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270

50 YEARS OF

STAR TREK

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OUT NOW

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Issue 270 The Ed Zone Mar 2016

Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE SFX HIVE MIND

RICHARD EDWARDS EDITOR RAVES



→ Clara may just be my favourite new Who companion, so I'm sorry to see her leave the TARDIS – she'll be a tough act to follow.

RANTS

→ I really wish Doomsday hadn't been revealed in the *Batman V Superman* trailer. How cool would it have been if he'd been a surprise in the movie?

NICK SETCHFIELD FEATURES EDITOR RAVES



→ Had a great night at the 35th anniversary *Flash Gordon* event at Bafta. A film that belongs on the big screen in all its demented, Blessed-powered glory.
→ How good was *Jessica Jones*? Sharp writing, an unsettling villain and a painfully real person at its superpowered heart. Marvel just upped its small-screen game.

IAN BERRIMAN HOME ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR RAVES



→ Scratch what I said last issue – *Jessica Jones* was the best thing to come out in 2015. Thoughtful, chilling, utterly addictive.
→ I've finally got a proper shelf to put all my old *Doctor Who* novelisations on! My house now feels like a home.

JORDAN FARLEY COMMUNITY EDITOR RANTS



→ This is my last SFX. To make matters worse the team have turned their backs on me, Klingon discommendation-style.
→ But it's been a life-changing six years, and I'm only going to SFX sister mag *Total Film* so I'll still pop up on these pages. After I've found a way to restore my honour!

RUSSELL LEWIN PRODUCTION EDITOR RAVES



→ Upcoming book *70s Monster Movies* – <http://bit.ly/70smonsters> – looks so much up my street I could have written it.
→ So I had the original *Star Wars* trilogy DVDs on my Christmas list. Why? I only got rid of my VHVs of them a few weeks back!
→ In 2015 visited six cinemas not visited before. I am Mr Explorer.

JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR RAVES



→ Enjoyed Peter Serafinowicz's snarky exploration of vintage BBC *Star Wars* items. Especially Blue Peter's *Star Wars* stew. Yummy!
→ Speaking of the mighty SW, I really wish that I hadn't just read the boxout on page 95 before seeing *Episode VII*. Damn my eyes!!

CATHERINE KIRKPATRICK DEPUTY ART EDITOR RAVES



→ Wishing I had more time to binge-watch *Jessica Jones*. First three eps have been fab! Ritter plays her with feisty attitude, and how creepy is Tennant?
→ *The Good Dinosaur* – just lovely.
→ Shame you don't get to properly see Idris Elba in the *Trek* trailer.

ADRIAN HILL AD MANAGER RAVES



→ Hello 2016! Looks like I'm going to be spending a lot of this year at the cinema: *Batman V Superman*, *Star Trek Beyond*, *Suicide Squad*, *Ghostbusters*. TV wise, *Westworld* looks fantastic. The return of *The X-Files* has got me intrigued too, but after all these years will it still have the appeal it once had?

JAYNE NELSON WRITER RAVES



→ The second season of *The Returned* felt like such hard work at first but it blossomed into one of the most satisfying shows I've watched in years.
→ RANTS
→ I'm so glad oh-so-perfect Clara has left Who at last. Please can we have a co-star for the Doctor who's ordinary, please?

TARA BENNETT US EDITOR (EAST COAST) RAVES



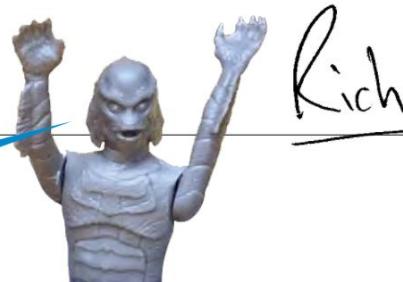
→ I was super nervous about the return of *The X-Files*, but luckily the debut episode satisfies on all counts.
→ RANTS
→ With Neill Blomkamp's *Alien V* off, I'm more and more bummed that Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* sequel is the only place I'm going to get any xenomorph feels.



Star Wars or Star Trek? The debate over which is better has raged for years, but it's a rather pointless one. After all, aside from the word "star", being set in space and their immense fanbases, what do the two franchises really have in common? It's like comparing the Beatles and the Rolling Stones – can't we just love them both, and be happy that two of the most enduring series in popular culture happen to feature spaceships?

Of course, when it comes down to longevity and volume, *Star Trek* wins hands down. This year it'll be half a century since Kirk and co first split infinitives (no longer a grammatical no-no, apparently), in which time we've seen five TV shows, 12 (soon to be 13) movies, and enough spin-off comics and books to fill a Borg Cube. This issue we kick off the celebrations for *Trek*'s big five-oh, looking back at five decades of history with the help of some of the people who've brought the Federation to life – including one William Shatner. Our *Trek* coverage starts on p57, and we'll be boldly going loads more over the course of the year.

This issue also marks the end of an era, as our incomparable news wrangler Jordan Farley heads off to explore the strange new worlds of our sister magazine, *Total Film*. He'll still be popping up in SFX from time to time – and the team will undoubtedly continue to ask him for computer advice – but for now, Mr Farley, live long and prosper.



Richard Edwards, Editor
@RichDEdwards

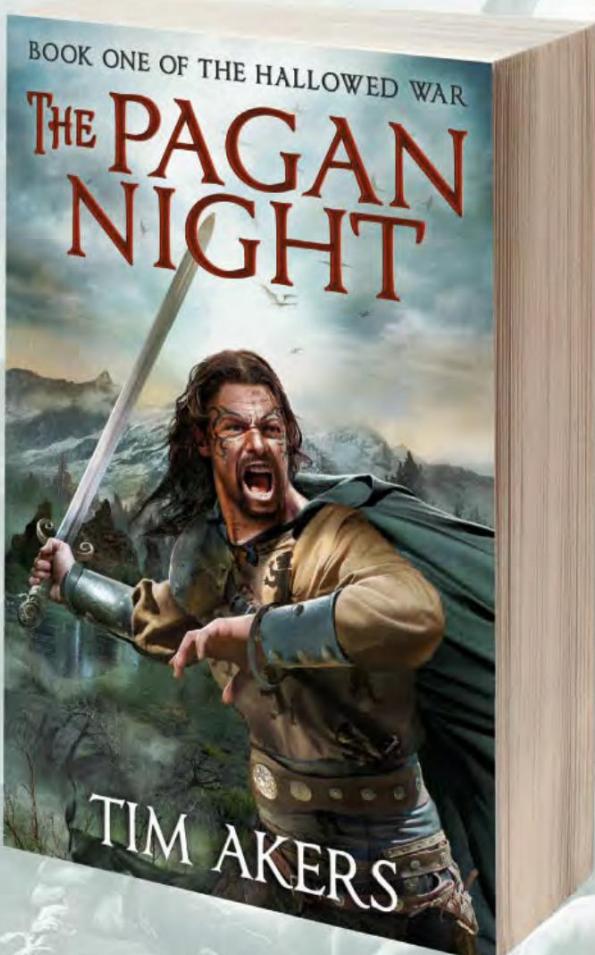
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on page
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- *Publishers Weekly*



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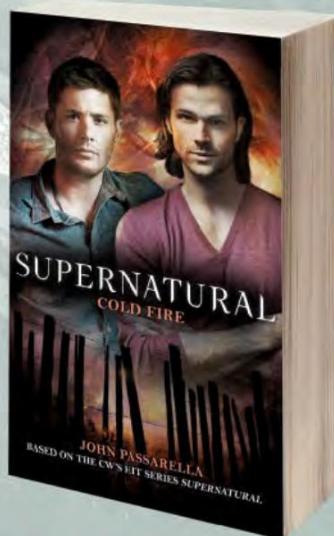
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MARCH
2016

→ NEWS | | | INTERVIEWS | | | INSIGHT | | | FORESTS! → edited by Jordan Farley

STAN SPEAKS!

FORTUNE AND GLORY

A London cop controls his own fate in
Stan Lee's Lucky Man

After a career spent building a universe of beloved comic book characters no one would begrudge the mighty Stan Lee taking a well-earned rest, but at 93 years old the Marvel legend is looking to conquer small-screen superheroics with *Lucky Man*. James Nesbitt stars in the Sky 1 series about a London detective who finds himself imbued with exceptional luck.

"I've had the idea for many years," Lee tells Red Alert. "I imagined it as anything or everything. I think it would make a great →



Highlights



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→ Natalie Dormer gets lost in some spooky woods in *The Forest*.



16 DEVILISH INTENTIONS

→ *Sandman's* Prince of Darkness gets his own TV spin-off.



24 MAGIC HOUR

→ Lev Grossman's fantasy series *The Magicians* heads to Syfy.

SCI-FACT! Stan Lee is the only actor to have appeared in every MCU movie to date.

“We wanted it to be thrilling. We didn’t want it to be drowned in darkness”

comic, a great television show certainly, or a great movie. If you have what you think is a good idea for a story it will usually work in any medium. It took until I met the right people to work with that we actually put it together.”

Lee’s story was snapped up by Carnival Films, the UK production company behind *Downton Abbey*, who turned to British writer Neil Biswas to fully flesh out the show. “I just leapt on it,” Biswas says. “The thing that worried me most was that it shouldn’t be hokey. I’m secretly suspicious that we all cannot help but attribute things to luck when we look at them, so I needed to find a way of making it accessible and believable.”

It might not be as flashy as web-slinging or hulking out, but as far as Stan Lee is concerned, good luck is the single best superpower a hero can have. “If you’re a superhero in a comic book and you have good luck, if somebody shoots at you he’ll miss. Whatever happens, it turns out in your favour,” Lee explains. “The idea is to write about a character that has good luck, but not all the time, so it becomes more interesting – will he have it or won’t he have it?”

LUCK OF THE IRISH

James Nesbitt plays Harry Clayton, a London detective whose debilitating gambling addiction has not only cost him his home, but put him into debt with a dangerous casino boss. After a one-night stand with Sienna Guillory’s mysterious stranger, Harry wakes up with a magical, fortune-infused bracelet locked around his wrist, but as with many of Lee’s best characters Harry’s power is equal parts blessing and curse.

“The great thing that Stan Lee does is you have someone with a superpower, and yet it’s all about their personal life. We’ve concentrated a little bit more on that,” Biswas says. “Harry is a human being who is given an opportunity to control his universe and yet, how does that affect a man who is already flawed? Specifically this power is something that goes right to the heart of his flaws. When he starts to use it and starts to realise it’s working, he then also realises that every time something pretty bad happens as well as something pretty good.”



Despite this risk, the bracelet comes in handy during Harry’s investigation into a crime spree sweeping the city. “What we’ve done is really try to heighten the way that we come at London and the way that we show what has gone on,” says Biswas. “In a very simple way there is a crimewave that becomes connected to a sort of supervillain character. There’s a nemesis that we start to realise is emerging. Harry is convinced of this and yet he finds it very difficult to persuade the rest of the force about it. The crimes that are committed, I think they’re pretty spectacular.”

The bulk of the 10-part series will consist of weekly cases for Harry to investigate, with a series-long arc about the bracelet and its origins running through. Biswas was also keen to preserve a sense of ambiguity around Harry’s power. “What’s great about *Lucky Man* is it has a massive fantasy element in terms of the bracelet, but you might not believe it. You can’t actually quantify luck. You can’t see it. It could just be a psychological portrait of a man who’s totally going off the rails and is starting to fantasise that he’s got a lucky bracelet. And yet it allows an audience to completely go with the ride in terms of Harry and what he thinks is going on.”

As a crime show, *Lucky Man* won’t shy away from some of the seedier sides of big city life, but Biswas and Lee were adamant that *Lucky Man* should also be fun. “We wanted it to be thrilling and enjoyable. We didn’t want it to be drowned in *True Detective* darkness,” Biswas says. “The crimes and certainly some of the stuff that happens in it is brutal, but at the same time we don’t immerse ourselves in a gloomy tone to depict it. To entertain is really what we were aiming for.”

Stan Lee’s Lucky Man airs early 2016 on Sky 1.



That’ll be a teenager’s bedroom, then.



James Nesbitt's Harry is joined by Amara Karan as DS Suri Chohan.



AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT

Further insights into the wonderful world of Stan Lee

COSTUME CONUNDRUM

→ Wondering why there's never been a comic book character with super-charged luck? Stan Lee has a theory: "As far as not using it in a comic book, the funny thing is all the superheroes have some sort of a costume. Nobody knows what kind of costume to give somebody whose power is luck! Nobody's been able to figure that out, so we never made it in comics. As far as movies and TV, it's just something nobody else thought of."

LUCKY STAN

→ If Stan Lee had the power to control his own luck, what would he use it for? "Oh man, if I were younger and single I'd use it to be very successful with females, I'd use it to make as much money as I could, I'd go to the track and bet on the winning horse and then once I had pockets full of money I'd see how much good I could do with it, to help other people. Of course I come first!"

GUEST WHO

→ Stan has a cameo in *Lucky Man*, one which inadvertently brought a London comic shop to a standstill, but it's not his favourite. "My favourite one is *Age Of Ultron*, where I'm talking to Thor, and he's drinking a very strong drink and I ask for a sip. So I take a drink and in the very next scene I'm being led out. I thought that was funny." As for the many movies and shows based on Stan's characters, he is, as ever, diplomatic. "I love everything that Marvel does, and since I created most of those characters I'm very thrilled with them."



KA-POW!

→ Stan runs POW! Entertainment with Gill Champion, who talks us through the production company's varied slate of upcoming projects. "We're creating a new cadre of IP that are either being developed by Stan or third parties," Champion says. "We're working on our first Chinese superhero film, we announced another film called *Arch Alien* that's a combination sci-fi superhero film, we're working on a live show that actually going to be under a dome, and there's a number of other projects. We try to keep Stan busy so he doesn't get bored."

SCI-FACT!*Second Chance* was previously known as *Frankenstein*, *The Frankenstein Code* and *Lookingglass*.**SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE**

STITCHED UP

A thoroughly modern Prometheus solves his own murder in *Second Chance*



Death isn't the final nail in the coffin on Fox's *Frankenstein* TV drama, *Second Chance*. After 75-year-old

Jimmy Pritchard is murdered during a burglary at his son's home, the former LA County Sheriff awakens in the much younger body of *Pacific Rim*'s Rob Kazinsky, courtesy of twin tech billionaires, who have their own agenda for the technology. Pritchard must learn from his past mistakes and become a better man, or drown in the temptations and corruption of his prior life.

"Pritchard is not an entirely changed man," says executive producer Rand Ravich. "He never got down on his hands and knees and said, 'If only I had another chance, I'd do it differently.' He was very happy to go grudgingly into the grave with 'this is my way or the highway, take it or leave it.' He didn't ask for it, so he wakes up the same person as he died as. He does realise he has a second chance and the people in his life are helping him see that maybe he doesn't have long to be that person. He's fighting that all the way through the series."

A cocktail of science fiction, procedural and

a dash of horror, *Second Chance* finds Jimmy immediately embracing the benefits of his new anatomy. Not only is he leaner, meaner and yes, more attractive, but Jimmy possesses certain enhanced abilities that assist him in enforcing the law and bringing his killer to justice.

"He's not mentally improved," explains Ravich. "Jimmy has that old, pre-political correctness and pre-internet mindset. He died recently, but his consciousness was solidified in the '60s. That is still 100 per cent intact in this new body and this new world. He's also stronger, faster and has more endurance. We make it clear it's not Superman, it's not the Flash. He's five times as fast, five times as strong, which is a lot. In his previous iteration, he did a lot of thinking with his fists to begin with. This return to youth on its own, added with this extra dimension, makes the character more interesting."

However, Jimmy's rebirth comes with drawbacks. He must return to the experimental tanks that reanimated him within a 24-hour period or his system begins to break down.

"Physically and scientifically, if Jimmy goes

out too long, he will die without the possibility of resurrection, so he constantly has to make that decision," says Ravich. "But it also emotionally tethers him to the people he has this problematic relationship with, the Goodwin twins, who brought him back without his asking. He can't break free of them. Jimmy is forced into a continual relationship with his creators."

Fox recently cut *Second Chance*'s initial episode count from 13 to 11. Nonetheless, Ravich remains confident that viewers will experience a complete and compelling story arc.

"It starts off in this great serialised fashion of, 'They brought this man back to solve his own murder,'" Ravich concludes. "It becomes episodic as he assembles his own life and, then, it has a fantastic three-episode ending where viewers are going to be incredibly satisfied. All of the characters, all of their intimate dynamics, will pay off in a big way." ●

Second Chance airs on Fox US from 13 January. A UK airdate is TBC.



REX (1)

“DON’T QUOTE ME”

“EVERYONE REFERS TO THE CANON, BUT IT HAS ZERO MEANING TO ME. I DON’T KNOW WHAT THE CANON IS. I CANNOT GET THAT STRAIGHT.”

If *The Force Awakens* writer Lawrence Kasdan doesn't know what *Star Wars* canon is, the rest of us have no hope.



AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

NEWBIES

- Kevin Bacon returning as Valentine McKee in a *Tremors* TV reboot.
- Found! Netflix resurrecting classic sci-fi series *Lost In Space*.
- Neil Marshall is rumoured to direct.
- Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* heading to Spike TV.
- Babylon 5*'s J Michael Straczynski will write.
- *Samurai Jack* is back! New episodes coming to Toonami from creator Genndy Tartakovsky.
- *Luther* creator Neil Cross penning pre-apocalyptic crime series *Hard Sun* for BBC One.
- *Marvel's Iron Fist* enlists *Dexter* veteran Scott Buck as showrunner.
- Horror anthology series *Channel Zero*, from Max Landis, gets a two-season order at Syfy.
- *HIM* coming from ITV – a three-part domestic drama about a teenage boy with supernatural powers.
- AMC adapting Joe Hill's *NOS4R2* for TV.



REX (1)



BLAKE HARRISON

THE FORMER INBETWEENER
PLAYING NAIVE PRIVATE PIKE
IN DAD'S ARMY

Favourite SF/fantasy film

→ The first that spring to mind are *The Empire Strikes Back*, *The Terminator*, *The Two Towers*, but crowbar to my head I'll pick *The Dark Knight*. Heath Ledger as the Joker is one of my all-time favourite performances. The balance between humour, unpredictability and psychotic menace makes him captivating.

Favourite SF/fantasy TV show

→ *Buffy/Angel*. So imaginative. I think Joss Whedon is a genius. He created a whole universe of monsters and prophecies all against a backdrop of real relationships and great humour. He took risks too, deviating from the natural format of the show with "Hush" and "Once More With Feeling". There was a short period where storylines would cross over between *Buffy* and *Angel* and I'd have to watch the box sets in a very specific order to complement the storylines properly.



Favourite SF character

→ Unsurprisingly it's the Joker. The Joker can work in so many different guises. Jack Nicholson, Heath Ledger, even Mark Hamill's in *The Animated Series* is brilliant. I'm interested in what Leto does with it.

Favourite SF/fantasy videogame

→ *Mass Effect 2*. I could probably play this game four times and have a different experience each time. I love feeling that the decisions I make genuinely affect the outcome of the story and the relationships with other characters. The only problem I had with the *Mass Effect* series was that my shepherd died a virgin. Therefore it was too close to my own life for my liking.

Dad's Army opens on 5 February.

REX (1)

SCI-FACT!

Coincidentally Gus Van Sant's next film, *The Sea Of Trees*, is also set in Aokigahara Forest.

5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

THE FOREST

The Japan-set chiller where an infamous forest becomes a final destination

THE FOREST EXISTS

1 When the makers of *The Forest* heard about Japan's Aokigahara Forest, aka the Suicide Forest, they felt it was an ideal setting for a horror film. "It was the location that attracted me," director Jason Zada tells Red Alert. "It's a magnet for sad people, and seems to act as a calling for the depressed and the suicidal. People walk 200 yards into the forest, and they get lost and can't find their way out."

THE HORROR IS IN THE MADNESS

2 The concept for the film was developed by David S Goyer, who then turned his idea over to writer Nick Antosca. "The suggestion is that this forest can tease out the darkest parts of you," says Antosca. "Obviously there's despair and fear inside all of us, and the idea of that being exploited is terrifying – the idea that, under the right circumstances, your psychological vulnerabilities could overwhelm you and make you do something you otherwise wouldn't. A very close friend of mine, my former writing partner, was bipolar, and he committed suicide in 2013, so it was important to me that the horror of the movie was rooted in real psychological struggle."

THERE'S A MISSING PERSON

3 Natalie Dormer plays Sara, an American woman who travels to Japan to find her twin sister, who has disappeared after entering the forest. Sara's quest reveals the existence of the tortured souls who inhabit the forest and attack anyone who enters their domain. "There's something so terrifying about a forest that doesn't let you out," says Zada. "Sara has to find a way out in the story, and the film is about



"I want people to think twice before entering a forest after seeing this"

her journey to the forest, because the forest becomes a character in the film, our bad guy."

SILENCE SPEAKS VOLUMES

4 In terms of generating scares, the makers of *The Forest* took a subtle approach, emphasising isolation over gory shocks. "I wanted the forest to look beautiful but also feel haunting and scary," says Zada. "My visual approach was to tell the story almost entirely from Sara's point-of-view, and so most of the effects in the film come from her – her silences, walking through the forest, the audience seeing what she sees."

IT GETS UNDER THE SKIN

5 While filming in Japan, the cast and crew experienced the forest's eerily unexplainable power firsthand. "People get scared when you tell them this story – when they don't know the forest is a real place," says Zada. "When they find out it's a real place, they find that very disturbing. I want this film to feel like a brutal descent into madness for the audience. As *Jaws* made people want to avoid the water, I want people to think twice before entering a forest after they see this film." ●

The Forest opens on 26 February.

SCI-FACT!

You can read an extract from *All The Birds In The Sky* on pages 112-113, and our review is on page 110.

AFTERLIFE CELEBRATING ICONIC SCI-FI STARS

112

LEE MAJORS

*Steve Austin in
The Six Million Dollar Man*



During his first UK appearance at MCM Birmingham Comic Con, Red Alert spoke to American actor Lee Majors from iconic '70s sci-fi series *The Six Million Dollar Man*. The show ran for five seasons, three films and spawned spin-off series *The Bionic Woman*. Majors recently appeared in the romantic comedy *Almosting It*.

Would you like to play the Six Million Dollar Man again?

→ Not at my age. With my knees giving up, I would need some bionic replacements.

What's the strangest request you've ever had from a fan?

→ I was doing a show in New York's Time Square, and this couple came in with a hood from *The Fall Guy* truck and asked me to sign it.

Would any of Steve's skills or attributes have been useful in real life?

→ I wouldn't mind having a bionic knee. They ran my butt off on that show and it took a lot out of me. I wish I had used my stuntman more.

What would Steve be doing now?

→ Probably kicking jihadists' butts.

Is there anything from *The Six Million Dollar Man* you wish was real?

→ It would have to be the bionics that they are now working on. They have perfected it to do really good stuff with legs, arms, eyes and everything.

What would be on his gravestone?

→ "I was short-changed" – now that they are making *The Six Billion Dollar Man*.



AUTHOR EXCLUSIVE

Charlie Jane Anders is working on new short stories and a second novel.

FLYING HIGH

io9's editor tells us about her new novel, which mixes up science fiction and fantasy



Charlie Jane Anders has "always" been interested in stories that bust open genre divisions". Accordingly, her new novel, *All The Birds In The Sky*, features at its heart "a story about a witch and a mad scientist" working together to prevent what she calls "a Buffy-type apocalypse rather than a Roland Emmerich-type apocalypse".

But how to incorporate two such disparate characters as Patricia, who works with other magical practitioners to repair the Earth, and engineering genius Laurence inside one novel? Thinking about the novel as "a book about a relationship, in which the two genres are really two worlds that the main characters come from" was key. This meant the book grew more serious through revisions as Anders honed in on the duo's relationship.

"I got fascinated by magic and science and what happens when they come together," she

says. "And honestly, the more the magic became a personal thing for Patricia, and the more the science became an extension of who Laurence is as a person, the better they worked."

To judge by the reaction of Michael Chabon (*The Amazing Adventures Of Kavalier & Clay*), it's not just the dynamic between characters but the novel as a whole that works brilliantly. The Pulitzer-winning author provides a generous, *Cloud Atlas*-referencing quote for the novel's jacket. "I had a total panic that somebody had spoofed his email address and sent us a fake blurb, as a prank," says Anders.

As for what's next, Anders is under contract for a second novel. "It's going to be totally different from *All The Birds In The Sky*," she says. "For one thing, at least for now, there's no humour whatsoever." ●

All The Birds In The Sky is published 26 January.

SCI-FACT!

Christian organisation One Million Moms has called for *Lucifer* to be cancelled.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

RAISING HELL

Neil Gaiman's Prince of Darkness leaps to the small screen in *Lucifer*

→ If you've been feeling like supernatural TV has been rather dark of late, then get ready to lighten up with *Lucifer*. The eponymous series is based on Neil Gaiman's character Lucifer Morningstar, from *The Sandman* and subsequent spin-off comics written by Mike Carey. For TV, the mythology is being executive produced by Joe Henderson, Jonathan Littman, and pilot director Len Wiseman.

"There will be a lot of devilish behaviour," Littman promises. "There will be mysteries, but it's not a procedural. It's a blend of comedy, genre and a bit of mystery."

Miranda's Tom Ellis embodies Lucifer as the son of Satan who leaves the Underworld. "The overriding aspect is Lucifer's rebellion against his father," Littman explains. "He leaves Hell and his father wants him back but he's like a 13-year-old, he doesn't want to go back."

Turns out Lucifer quite likes the debauchery of Los Angeles and opens his own sin bin in the form of nightclub, Lux. "He owns a club and he's a devil so it's like Rick in *Casablanca*," Littman explains. "There are people who will come looking for favours and he's completely unabashed that he's the devil. But while he's here, he starts to do things that are good, which completely confounds him because he doesn't understand it. So the backdrop of the series will be Lucifer's journey."

But don't let Lucifer's road to enlightenment deceive you. Littman promises the ride will be very fun. "It's not trying to be a heavy genre show. It is funny and does not take itself seriously. Tom has done a great job creating that character. It's very dry and borderline inappropriate in places." ●

Lucifer airs 25 January on Fox. UK airdate TBC.



"Please allow me to introduce myself..."

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE

Which other Gaiman characters should get a spin-off?

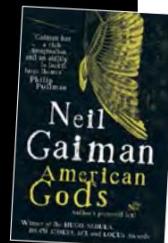


The Corinthian (*Sandman* comics)

→ Another *Sandman* character to explore could be the charismatic nightmare Corinthian, who is very much a fan of the phrase "an eye for an eye" - ie he has mouths where his eyes should be, and uses them to eat other people's eyes. Hey, we didn't say it would be a heroic spin-off...

Mr Wednesday (*American Gods*)

→ In *American Gods*, loveable rogue Mr Wednesday - a wise-cracking, womanising conman - is revealed to be an incarnation of Norse god Odin. We feel we're definitely owed some sort of on-the-road prequel.



Crowley & Aziraphale (*Good Omens*)

→ *Good Omens*, co-written with Terry Pratchett, gave us the angel Aziraphale and demon Crowley. Given that one was the guardian of Eden while the other tempted Eve onto a path of devastation, they bounced off each other pretty well. Buddy movie, anyone?

Marquis de Carabas (*Neverwhere*)

→ He's technically already had a spin-off with short story "How The Marquis Got His Coat Back", but that surely can't be the last we hear of the cunning trickster. He is, by far, the best character in a book already full of great characters.



SCI-FACT!

As well as playing RL Stine, Jack Black also voices Slappy in *Goosebumps*.



FIVE MINUTES WITH...

JACK BLACK

The *Goosebumps* star on devils, demons and dodging David Lynch

GHOST GOALS

➲ “I never saw a ghost when I was a kid. I was more scared of girls. I’d have loved to have seen a ghost. It’s on my bucket list: ‘See a ghost.’ It’s right behind ‘See a UFO.’”

MAGIC MAN

➲ “One time I invited a few of my friends over for a Ouija board experiment. I had rigged the whole room with little invisible wires that I would pull to make it seem like spirits were in the room. That was my deal. I was kind of a charlatan. I always wanted to make the other kids think that magic was real.”

DANCING WITH THE DEVIL

➲ “[Tenacious D] has a fascination with 1980s heavy metal music where the devil was always front and centre. If you weren’t selling enough records, just put the devil on the cover and start rumours that you sold your soul.”

TRUE LIES

➲ “Oh, all kinds of scary things happened [on the *Goosebumps* set]. Books flying off shelves... That’s what you have to say on any scary movie, to generate bogus buzz! Yeah, I’ve heard there’s some things... I’m sorry. I didn’t prepare my bogus haunting stories!”

A BOY’S LIFE

➲ “I’m a 44-year-old man. But I still feel very boyish in my fascinations with videogames and the movies that I’m drawn to. On the flight over here, I was like, ‘What should I watch? I could watch that David Lynch film... Eh, I’m just gonna watch *Captain America*.’ That’s not a man’s choice! But it was awfully good.” ●



SCI-FACT!

True Blood fans will recognise Allan Hyde (Godric), who plays the villainous prefect Pieter Stockman on *Heartless*.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

NORDIC BITES

True Blood meets *The Bridge* in the supernatural Scandi drama *Heartless*



What do you get when you infuse
supernatural drama with a dose of
Nordic noir? The answer is *Heartless*,
a Danish series coming to Channel 4's digital
hub All4, where it will be available to stream.

Teen twins Sebastian and Sofie have a dark secret: a curse placed on their family compels them to feed on people's lifeforce in order to survive, but there's more to the vampires in *Heartless* than fangs and gothic romance.

"When we wrote *Heartless*, we were definitely inspired by *True Blood* and *Twilight*," writer Nikolaj Scherfig explains. "But in Scandinavia, there's a convention of infusing entertainment with valuable social commentary. So it's a supernatural show, but we still want the audience to feel like they're watching a psychological thriller."

Sebastian and Sofie's search for a cure takes them to the Ottmansgaard boarding school, where they discover that they're not the only students haunted by the ghosts of their past. And while "good guy" Sebastian is drawn to the darkness, the jaded Sofie finds

her loyalties divided when she falls for the principal's daughter.

Scherfig, who's also a writer on *The Bridge*, was very conscious of grounding the series in reality. "The first question we asked was, 'how can we relate this to our own lives?' In the writers' room we discovered that we're all touched by some family tragedy, something that happened long before we were born. And that's something we explore in *Heartless*: how we're all still fighting our ancestors' wars."

In keeping with the Nordic storytelling tradition, *Heartless* doesn't shy away from brutality or sexual content. "We decided to just go for it. Nothing was taboo," Scherfig says. "The awesome thing about using sex and violence – without me sounding like a crazy person – is that it's still always about the big emotions. It really reflects that existential crisis you go through when you're young, where everything feels like life or death." ●

Heartless is available as a free box set exclusively on All4.com/WalterPresents.

She was always moody when asked to help with the luggage.



Those giants don't stand a chance.

CREATOR INTERVIEW

TALL TALES

Joe Kelly on transforming *I Kill Giants* from comic to Hollywood blockbuster



"Everybody is putting the story first, which is a really unique thing in Hollywood." After publishing it as an Image series in 2008, Joe Kelly is now adapting *I Kill Giants* for the big screen. The *Deadpool* scribe always envisaged his story for the cinema, having originally penned it as a speculative film script.

"The screenplay has existed for almost as long as the comic," says Kelly, who has enjoyed almost unprecedented creative freedom. "I've been one hundred per cent involved, and everybody knows that there is no movie without me."

Described as "a story about children, but for everybody," the film is set to star Zoe Saldana as school psychologist Mrs Mollé and Madison Wolfe as her young patient, who retreats into an imaginary world where she believes she is actually tasked with killing giants.

"It requires a certain amount of fearlessness to put a kid in a certain situation that's emotionally challenging, and is still going to terrify an audience," says Kelly, who is working closely with Danish director Anders Walter, whose similarly themed *Helium* won Best Short Film at the 2014 Oscars. "His work deals with what happens when you're young, and you feel kind of helpless before gaining a kind of empowerment. His films have this dreamlike, visual imagery that's perfect for *Giants*, which is about a girl who has a very rich fantasy life." ●

I Kill Giants will be released at a future date by Treehouse Pictures.

SCI-FACT! *Civil War* is the final standalone Cap film in Chris Evans' Marvel contract.

CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

It's Team Cap vs Team Shellhead in Marvel's next epic

OUT
29 APRIL
2016



→ It's anyone's guess how Bucky got his arm stuck in that vice, but Cap's old friend has finally shaken his Winter Soldier programming.



→ Bucky's done bad things though, and Steve is willing to go rogue to protect his BFF from The Man.



→ William Hurt's "Thunderbolt" Ross isn't happy that superpowered folk are running around unsupervised after the events of *Age Of Ultron*...



→ ...hence the Sokovia Accords, a registration act for supers. The Accords were briefly mentioned in *Ant-Man*'s post-credits scene.



→ Steve's rejection of the Accords puts him in opposition to Tony, who's had a change of heart about authority after his *Ultron* apocalyptic vision.



→ Glimpsed here are Emily VanCamp's Sharon Carter and Martin Freeman's unidentified suit. But whose side are they on?



→ Black Widow may be on Team Tony, but Sam will always have Steve's back. Not in this trailer: The Vision and Spider-Man.



→ Iron Man and War Machine take to the skies at Leipzig-Halle airport during an epic scrap. Daniel Brühl's Baron Zemo may not be far away.



→ Here's our first look at Chadwick Boseman's Black Panther and his impressive vibranium suit. He's on Team Tony, and seems he's after Bucky.



→ Team Cap assemble! Hawkeye's back and Scarlet Witch has nifty new flying powers. Ant-Man may be in this image somewhere too.



→ Rhodey's grounded after having his Arc Reactor ripped out, presumably by Bucky who tries the same trick later on Tony.



→ Steve and Bucky square off against Iron Man. We'd say Ol' Shellhead has no chance, but Tony always has a trick up his sleeve.

The Buzz



NICK It's bromageddon! I was worried about the potential pile-up of characters but this reassures me: a sharp, clear focus on the emotional heart of it all. I'm backing Team Cap of course.



RICH I loved *The Winter Soldier*'s thriller edge, and *Civil War* looks like another entry from the grittier end of the MCU. Can't wait to see how Cap fares against Iron Man and co.



JORDAN Needn't have worried its colossal cast would turn *Civil War* into *The Avengers 2.5*; for all its pulse-racing superhero standoffs this feels like a satisfying next step after *The Winter Soldier*.



CATHERINE Let the battle of the Avengers commence! I have to say I'm with Iron Man - stop beating him up, Cap! This looks like one fun ride and we haven't even glimpsed Spidey yet.

STAGE FRIGHT

Viewers beware, you're in for a scare at *Goosebumps Alive*



If you're the kind of person who follows innocent requests to "say cheese" with "and die" in a hushed whisper, then *Goosebumps Alive*, an immersive theatrical adaptation of RL Stine's best-selling horror series, is for you. We spoke to writer/director Tom Salomon about what to expect.

Why is *Goosebumps* a good fit for the stage?

➲ There are so many interesting little stories and twists and turns that we thought it would be an exciting thing to try to tell all these vignettes on the stage, especially in an immersive setting where there's lots of stuff to play with, and see and hold.

The show is aimed at adults, is that purely for nostalgia's sake?

➲ The approach we're taking is really to try and focus on the audience that read them as kids and so there's a nostalgia factor, but we're also updating it and modernising it for grown up fears and anxieties.

How are you approaching the immersive aspect of the production?

➲ There are different ways to approach immersive theatre. This is decidedly *not* participatory, but we're taking any opportunity we can to put our audience into the middle of these scenes and make them feel the anxiety of the characters.

Which stories are you adapting?

➲ A lot of the stories that jumped out at us are based on what we could explore in terms of the inner psychology of the characters. By the same token you can't make *Jurassic Park* without the T-rex, so there are certain fan favourites that we wanted to address.

There's also a separate production for kids, what can you tell us about that?

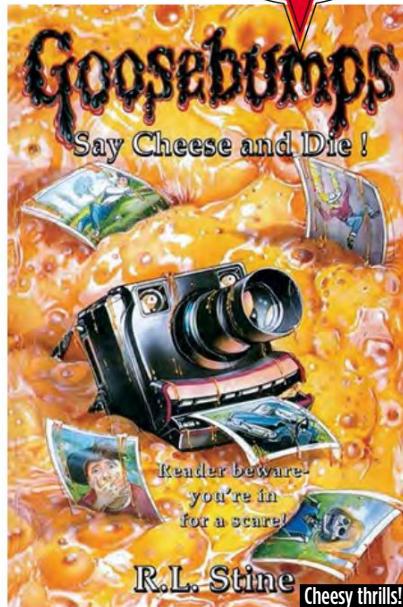
It's a separate thing, but it'll reflect some of the stuff that we're doing. We really want to steer ours for adults, so ours is going to be frightening and anxiety-provoking and hopefully thought-provoking. The kids one much less so, but still an engaging, visceral experience. ☀



www.goosebumpsalive.com

DATE
6 April - 4 September

LOCATION
The Vaults,
Leake Street,
London



DATE
27-28 February

LOCATION
Meadowbank
Sports Centre,
Edinburgh

GREAT SCOTS

Attend the inaugural *Capital Sci-fi Con* and do your bit for charity



Vader: keen fundraiser.

➲ We all know that science fiction fans have hearts bigger than the stomach of planet-eater Unicron, but the team behind brand new Edinburgh-based convention Capital Sci-fi Con have hearts bigger than most – they're harnessing the power of sci-fi to raise money for Rachel House children's hospice.

For a first-time con the guest line-up isn't half bad: Dave Prowse, Virginia Hey, *Predator* actor Ian Whyte, White Walker Ross Mullan, *Viz* co-founder Simon Donald, *Clone Wars* artist Tanya Roberts and many more. There'll also be guest talks and photo shoots, a *Star Wars* art exhibition, a cosplay comp, movie cars on show and plenty of merch to buy.

Tickets are available now or on the door, but pre-buying gets you early entry. There are also (reasonably priced!) meal-with-the-stars tickets available, and a VIP package which gets you access to the front row at stage events. All profits are going to Rachel House and the team has already raised over £3,400 through promotional fund-raising events. ☀

www.capitalscificon.co.uk

COMING UP

HORROR-ON-SEA

22-31 January

Around 60 independent horror films are screening across two weekends at the fourth annual Southend horror-fest – expect a cheeky world premiere or two. www.horror-on-sea.com

SF BALL 22

5-7 February

Jonathan Frakes and Julian Glover are off to the ball – the three-day SF Ball in Southampton. www.sfevents.com/sfball

LONDON ANIME & GAMING CON

5-7 February

Expect the usual mix of anime, gaming, cosplay and music at the latest London anime and gaming convention. www.londonanimecon.com

DIGI-CON 2

21 February

Journey to Doncaster for a day of merch, celebrity guests (including *Who*, *Star Wars* and *Red Dwarf*), movie vehicles and themed displays. www.digi-con.co.uk

FILM AND COMIC CON CARDIFF

27-28 February

Amazing *Spider-Man* writer Dan Slott and a trio of *Who* stars – Colin Baker, Nicola Bryant and Jemma Redgrave – are among the guest confirmed for the latest Cardiff con. www.filmandcomicconcardiff.com

MEET YOUR FAVOURITE STARS AT ROGUE EVENTS CONVENTIONS



THE CITY OF HEROES #2

Heroes from Comic Book adaptations in TV Shows

13th – 15th May 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Danielle Panabaker / **The Flash**, David Ramsey / **Arrow**,
Katie Cassidy / **Arrow**, Peyton List / **The Flash**, Amy Gumenick /
Arrow, Tom Cavanagh / **The Flash**, Carlos Valdes / **The Flash**,
Keiynan Lonsdale / **The Flash** ... and more tba.



INSURGENCY 8

The Vampire Diaries & The Originals

10th – 12th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Charles Michael Davis / **The Originals**,
Matt Davis / **The Vampire Diaries**,
Shaun Sipos / **The Vampire Diaries**,
Chase Coleman / **The Originals** ... and more tba.



Prophecy

Buffy the Vampire Slayer & Angel the Series

17th – 19th June 2016

Hilton Birmingham Metropole Hotel

Alyson Hannigan/ **BtVS**, **AtS**,
Alexis Denisof / **BtVS**, **AtS**,
Christian Kane / **AtS**, Tom Lenk / **BtVS**,
Stephanie Romanov / **AtS** ... and more tba.



WOLFS BANE 4

Teen Wolf

16th – 18th September 2016

Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel

Gage Golightly,
Ryan Kelly,
Stephen Lunsford
... and more tba.

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ROGUE EVENTS

+++ Tickets available at rogueevent.co.uk +++ Adults: £110.00 +++ Children £75.00 +++

All actors appear subject to work commitment.

SCI-FACT!

Doctor Strange cinematographer Ben Davis has cited *Fantasia* and MC Escher as visual influences.

DOCTOR STRANGE

Stuff you need to know about Marvel's Strangest entry yet

THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW

⦿ Marvel has been gently teasing the mightiest magician in the cosmos for a few movies now, and Stephen Vincent Strange MD is now finally set to sprinkle his magic. But with *Captain America: Civil War* juggling the full Albert Square of storylines and characters, *Doctor Strange* – directed by *Sinister*'s Scott Derrickson – is going to be a mostly self-contained origin story. Mostly.

SLEUTH TO SORCERER

⦿ Lofty arrogance? Extraordinary intelligence? Weighty foibles? Benedict Cumberbatch sounds like the perfect fit for the silver streaks, with the movie employing a fairly straight bat with the basic story: the world's greatest neurosurgeon has his marvellous hands mangled, sending him across the planet – and eventually the dimensions – in search of meaning, bridging the science world and the mystic one to become Sorcerer Supreme.

YOU'RE HIRED

⦿ But first Strange has to serve an apprenticeship under the Ancient One, a Himalaya-based Marvel-Yoda looking to pass the cosmic crown on to a worthy younger head before she exits this plain of reality. Marvel's casting crew has played a blinder, swapping the gender and casting "ambiguous" Tilda Swinton in the part.

CLASS RIVAL

⦿ The Good Doctor's won't be the only bumpprint on the Ancient One's upholstery. But while former student Baron Karl Mordo isn't entirely enamoured of the new teacher's pet, Chiwetel Ejiofor's Transylvanian grudge-packer will be following the beat of Strange's drum... this time around anyway.

DARKNESS RISES

⦿ Who's Doctor Strange's big bad then? Well,

"menacing" Mads Mikkelsen is on board as a hush hush character, but let's not beat about the bush with your Nightmares or Satannishs here. We'll just say he's playing Dormammu, the Lord of the Realm of Darkness – a blazing beast from another dimension and Sorcerer Supreme's number one foe.

CLEA AND PRESENT DANGER

⦿ If we're chalking Mads up as Dormammu, then that would make Rachel McAdams's similarly top-secret role Clea, Strange's future paramour from the Dark Dimension and also Dormammu's niece. We'd bank on Clea ditching the flaming family ties and getting registered to a new surgery by the climax.

A GEM OF A STORY

⦿ Of course *Doctor Strange* is going to tie in with the rest of the MCU, specifically by way of the Infinity Gems or – as they've been rebranded – the Infinite Six. The Sorcerer Supreme just happens to have the powerful-if-pernicious Soul Stone swinging around his neck – expect the necklace to get passed on from the Ancient One to Doctor Strange before finding itself powering Thanos's Infinity War.

WHEN TO EXPECT IT?

⦿ *Doctor Strange* opens on 4 November 2016. ●



“DON’T QUOTE ME”
“IT’S NOT MY INTENTION TO HAVE ANOTHER ACTOR STEP INTO HIS SHOES IN THE WAY THERE HAVE BEEN MANY ACTORS THAT HAVE PLAYED SPIDER-MAN OR BATMAN.”

There's only one Indy, according to Steven Spielberg.



AERIAL ASSAULT

SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

SHOWRUNNING
→ *Supergirl* lands a full, 20-episode first season at CBS.



→ *Bounty hunter* series *Killjoys* coming to Syfy UK later this month.

→ *Ash Vs Evil Dead* now airing in the UK via Virgin's on demand service.

→ *Star Wars Rebels* renewed for a third season.

→ *Peter Jackson* posts a humorous, Peter Capaldi-starring video that strongly suggests he will helm an upcoming episode of *Doctor Who*.

→ *Wayward Pines* renewed for a second season.

CASTING CALL

→ Tom Amandes to play Calculator in an upcoming episode of *Arrow*, guest-starring Roy Harper.

→ *Luke Cage* casts Sonia Braga as Claire Temple's mum, Soledad.

→ Patton Oswalt and Felicia Day to star in new episodes of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

→ Italia Ricci to play DC villainess Silver Banshee in a recurring role on *Supergirl*.

GETTY (1), REX (4)



SCI-FACT!

Created by Jim Shooter and David Lapham, Faith made her debut in 1992's *Harbinger: Children Of The Eighth Day*.

NEW AUTHOR

ERIKA SWYLER

THE PLAYWRIGHT AND FOOD BLOGGER WRITING BOOKS ABOUT BOOKS. ALSO MERMAIDS



What is *The Book Of Speculation* about?

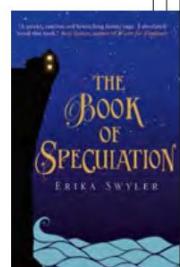
→ It's about Simon Watson, a research librarian who receives a mysterious book which unearths a family curse that's been killing women in his family for centuries. He's frantic to break the curse before his sister becomes its next victim. His efforts lead him to uncover the twisted history of a travelling circus in the 1790s, drowning mermaids, tarot, star-crossed lovers, and the secret lives his parents led.

What are the big themes/ideas you tackle in the book?

→ Inheritance, loss, obligation, and the different shapes love and family can take. I went broad with themes. They're tied together through a love for books and the written word. It's no small way a book for bibliophiles.

How long did it take you to write?

→ It took the better part of a decade to figure out not just what I wanted to write, but how to write it. I had the idea long before I had the skill to commit it to paper. I've lost count of the number of drafts, but there are more than enough pages to fill a room.



Which SF/fantasy authors would you like to be compared to in a dream review?

→ Susanna Clarke or Neil Gaiman would be right up there. Those comparisons are never going to happen for me, but I deeply admire the humour and intelligence that bubbles in their writing. I also have an enormous book crush on Kirsty Logan.

The Book Of Speculation is published by Atlantic Books on 4 February.

Faith (also known as Zephyr) knows all the superhero rules.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

FLYING SOLO

Sky's the limit for Valiant's resident geek *Faith* in her first miniseries

 **"Faith's incredibly identifiable to me"**

According to Jody Houser, she was born to write *Faith*. With the character having initially appeared as part of the *Harbinger Renegades*, Valiant are now giving pop culture loving psiot Faith Herbert her own four-part.

"She stands as a representation of the very best that both geekdom and superheroes have to offer," says Houser, who will be joined by artists Francis Portela and Marguerite Sauvage. "She's passionate and compassionate, and is driven by the optimism that one person really can make a difference."

As a comics fan, Faith knows all the tricks of the trade, as she takes up a position as a Clark Kent-style reporter. "Faith is incredibly genre-savvy," says Houser. "She grew up with the same superheroes that we did and, for her, they form the basis of what a superhero should

be. So the traditional elements like an alter ego, a journalism career, and superhero patrols... But she's smart enough to know that glasses alone aren't that great of a disguise, which is why she wears a wig as well!"

With Houser promising "plenty of geek nods, LA references and adorable puppies," Faith attempts to strike out on her own, only to find herself single-handedly fending off an alien invasion. "It's really her first time out in the real world as an adult," explains Houser. "So she has to deal with mundane challenges like weird neighbours and interesting co-workers, alongside threats to humanity." ●

Faith is published by Valiant on 27 January.



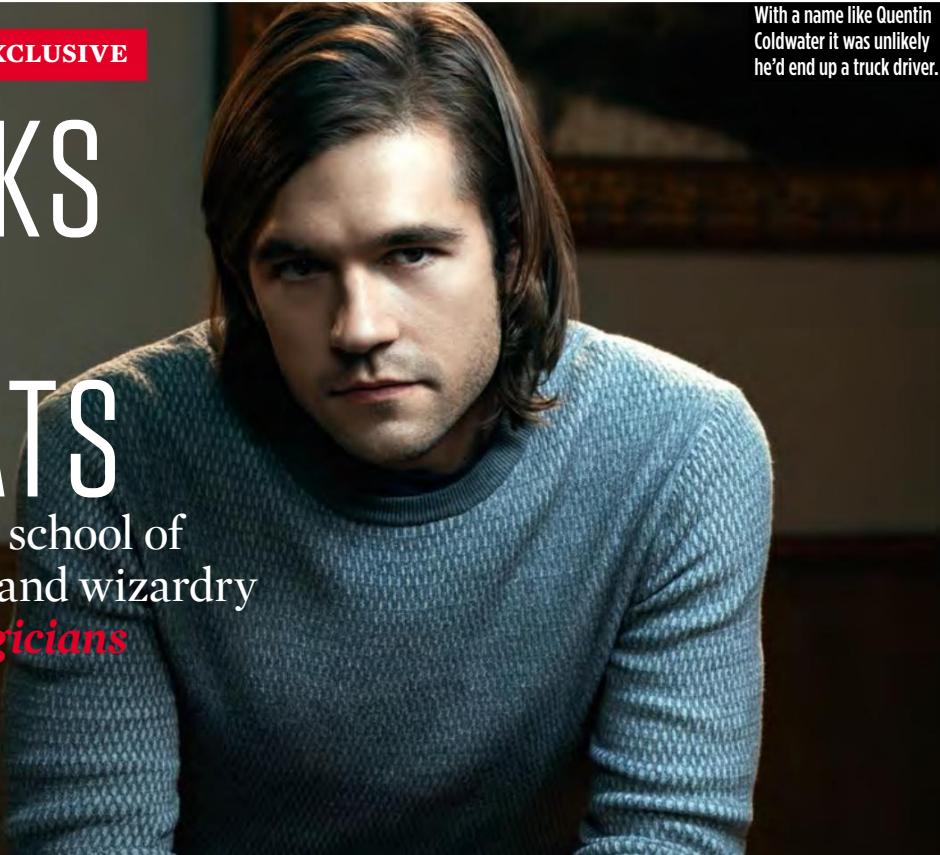
SCI-FACT!

The Magicians has two literary sequels: *The Magician King* and *The Magician's Land*.

PRODUCER EXCLUSIVE

TRICKS AND TREATS

Visit Syfy's school of witchcraft and wizardry in *The Magicians*



An older skewing mash-up of the worlds of

Lev Grossman's *The Magicians* revolves around the magical education of Quentin Coldwater (Jason Ralph) at Brakebills College. A grad student who has always felt like an outsider, Coldwater is wooed to the secret school and discovers he has inherent magical abilities.

Executive producers John McNamara (*Trumbo*) and Sera Gamble (*Supernatural*) tell Red Alert they both loved the books for their "smart and amazing character work". Gamble in particular admired that they were written "from a knowing place by someone who owns being a fan of genre. It feels like the fantasy story where the main character is the guy who shows up in costume at Comic-Con and that was very appealing to me."

For their adaptation, the characters have been aged up because Gamble explains, "We knew we were going to take them on a long journey of more than a decade and that's much easier done with actors in their early twenties. Also, the kind of coming of age stories we were eager to tell are adult and dark in their nature. Once we moved our characters into graduate school that opened things up because the course of study isn't regimented to the same extent as undergraduate



She has a big old book of magic, and she's not afraid to use it.

stories, so we had more freedom to tell the specific incidents at Brakebills in the order we wanted to."

Gamble says the first season of the series will follow Grossman's first book but also feature Brakebills student, Julia Wicker (Stella Maeve) and another major character from book two, *The Magician King*. "We took Julia's story into [season] one so we could see her story and Quentin's story play out simultaneously and bounce off one another."

Season one will consist of 10 episodes which Gamble says, "Will go much more deeply into the stories of the other characters. The book is deeply focused on Quentin's journey, but we get to take these characters apart and figure out what makes them tick. It becomes more of an ensemble and you get to care about all of the characters."

And the show won't shy away from its fantastical heart, which Gamble says is what makes this series special. "One thing that's fun to me is the element of pure fantasy just for the love of it, which is a fun array of colours to play with." ●

The Magicians airs on Syfy US from 25 Jan.

“DON’T QUOTE ME”

“IT’S JUST PEOPLE TRYING TO PROFIT OFF THE BACK OF SOMETHING THAT’S VERY BEAUTIFUL. IT’S SHAMEFUL.”

Something tells us Donald Sutherland won't be buying a ticket for the *Don’t Look Now* remake.



© REX (1)



NEWS WARP

HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ Margaret Atwood writing *Angel Catbird* – a trio of graphic novels about a part-cat, part-owl, part-human superhero.

→ RIP Big actor Robert Loggia and *This Island Earth* star Rex Reason.

→ Lancaster University appoints UK's first professor of graphic fiction and comic art.

→ Titan continuing the adventures of Tom Baker's Fourth Doctor in a new comic series.

→ *Ex-Machina* scoops best screenplay, best film and best director at the British Independent Film Awards.



→ Stephen Baxter penning official *War Of The Worlds* sequel, *The Massacre Of Mankind*.

→ John Malkovich and Robert Rodriguez have made *100 Years*, a film that's being bunged in a time capsule for a century.

→ *BBC Three* moving online only from the end of February.

→ Frank Miller keen to pen *Dark Knight IV*, without Brian Azzarello.

Red Alert Mar 2016

Image Bank

Views To A Kill

SCI-FACT!

George Lucas hoped to remake *Flash Gordon*, but was unable to acquire the rights, leading him to create *Star Wars*.



SAVIOURS OF THE UNIVERSE

Sam J Jones, Melody Anderson and the cast of sci-fi classic *Flash Gordon* jetted into London recently for a 35th anniversary *Flash Gordon* celebration at Bafta. Our Nick was in attendance and managed to interview Brian Blessed for 15 minutes without asking him a single question. Look out for that in a future issue.



BLONDIE AMBITION

When the Tenth Doctor met Janis Joplin they got on so well she gave him that classy trenchcoat, so it stands to reason the Twelfth Doctor (and Clara) would be best mates with Blondie. This no doubt explains this amazing variant cover for Titan Comics' *The Twelfth Doctor Year Two* #4 by Simon Myers, where the cast of *Who* recreate the band's *Parallel Lines* cover.



HULK BUSTIN'

Thomas DePetrillo of Extreme Costumes spent a whopping 16,000 hours building this incredible 9.6ft tall Hulkbuster costume. Man and suit flew into London last month to celebrate the launch of Sky Movies' Christmas experience at The O2 - a free event running till Feb featuring virtual reality experiences from *Age Of Ultron* and other Disney flicks.



Nick Setchfield's

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



ORIGINAL PIRATE MATERIAL

STAR WARS: HAN SOLO

So what's the collective noun for 2,500 Han Solos? A smirk? A swagger? A *Harrison*? That's the number of young hopefuls who have reportedly tested for the role of the Corellian space pirate in the upcoming prequel movie (yes, some casting decisions venture beyond simply typing the words Chris and Pratt...). Candidates to

wear the bloodstripes include *Age Of Ultron*'s **Aaron Taylor-Johnson**, *Jurassic World*'s **Nick Robinson**, *Arrow*'s **Colton Haynes**, *Fury*'s **Logan Lerman**, *Harry Potter*'s **Tom Felton** and *Fantastic Four*'s **Miles Teller**. We like to think the auditioning process involved gutting a Tauntaun, drawing "I know" in an epically nonchalant manner and, of course, shooting first. That's SHOOTING

FIRST. Screenwriter **Lawrence Kasdan** promises an unexpected take for this solo Solo. "**Phil Lord** and **Chris Miller** are going to make [it] and I can't guess what that will be like – and I'm writing it."

THE POWER OF FOUR!

ALIEN: COVENANT

Ridley Scott, it's fair to say, is a man with ambition. *Alien: Covenant*

will follow 2012's *Prometheus* as the second film in a brand new xenomorphic quadrilogy. "It's a very complex story," shares the veteran filmmaker. "It's an evolution of what I first did with *Prometheus*... I was amazed that in the three [films] that followed [1979's *Alien*] no one asked the question 'Why the Alien, who made it and why?' The new film will see a colony ship named *Covenant*

arriving at a remote planet whose sole inhabitant is **Michael Fassbender**'s synthetic David. "When that's finished there'll be another one and then another one which will gradually drive into the back entrance of the film in 1979... Why was this space jockey there and why did he have an Alien inside him? And those questions will be answered." Filming begins this March at Sydney's Fox Studios. *Prometheus* star **Noomi Rapace** will, it seems, only briefly be seen as Elizabeth Shaw but we imagine Fassbender will be rather more than a disembodied head with terrific hair.

PARTNERS IN CRIMEFIGHTING!

ANT-MAN AND THE WASP

Given its \$520 million global box office haul it's no wonder Marvel are keen to recreate the unique creative alchemy that powered last summer's *Ant-Man*. The studio's now locked screenwriters **Andrew Barrer** and **Gabriel Ferrari** for sequel duty alongside **Adam McKay**, who wrangled the first film's script with star **Paul Rudd**. But returning director **Peyton Reed** is equally keen to shake up the winning formula, refusing to reheat the heist movie vibe of the original film. "We have an entirely different genre template," he tells *Comic Book Resources*. Reed is also looking forward to seeing **Evangeline Lilly** inherit the shrink-suit. "I'm excited about the idea that Ant-Man and the Wasp were a partnership throughout the history of Marvel Comics. It's a different dynamic than we've seen in the rest of the Marvel movies... a romantic partnership and a heroic partnership, so it's going to be fun to play around with that and discover what the movie version of that is."

BACK IN BLACK!

MEN IN BLACK 4

Just like *Ghostbusters*, the *Men In Black* franchise is set for a chromosomal shake-up. Longtime producer **Laurie MacDonald** says the next film in the series will see the debut of "a prominent woman in black", cueing a brand new chapter for the neurallyser-wielding ET-chasers. "We sort of



Illustration by Paul Cemmick

ALSO BURNING

→ **Idris Elba** the new frontrunner to play the Gunslinger in *The Dark Tower...* **Ethan Hawke** and **John Goodman** joining **Luc Besson's** *Valerian...* *Independence Day: Resurgence* screenwriter **Carter Blanchard** tackling *Uncanny Valley...* Lionsgate still planning *Hunger Games* prequels... *Creed* helmer **Ryan Coogler** in the frame for Marvel's *Black Panther...* The Weinstein Company adapting Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist...* **David Bruckner** no longer directing *the Friday The 13th* reboot...

Fred Dekker says *Predator* sequel screenplay is done... Warner reportedly considering a *Teen Titans* movie... *Fantastic Four 2* dropped from Twentieth Century Fox's 2017 schedule... **Vin Diesel** developing fourth *Riddick* movie alongside TV spin-off... Paramount brainstorming a *Micronauts* movie with **Akiva Goldsman...** **Brad Pitt** producing YA adap *Illuminae...* *Iron Man* writers **Art Marcum** and **Matt Holloway** and *Black Hawk Down's* **Ken Nolan** orbiting *Transformers 5...* **Sam Riley** in talks to play the villain in *Ghost In The Shell...*

“It’s a different dynamic than we’ve seen in the rest of the movies”

looked at the first three in retrospect as a bit of a trilogy," she tells the BBC. "We tried to tell a story about those two characters and that relationship. It sounds silly because it's a fun science fiction comedy but when you work on these things you sort of try to find some thematic basis underneath it. Now we are looking at a reinvention, but it's a wonderful world to get back into." Early reports had **Will Smith** skipping this sequel but MacDonald says there's still a chance he'll strap on the Ray-Bans for a fourth turn as Agent J. "Never count Will out..." As if we would.

DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE!

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 6

→ A welcome economic upswing awaits manufacturers of lifelike latex masks and self-destructing cassette tapes. **Tom Cruise** is reuniting with *Rogue Nation* writer/director **Christopher McQuarrie** for another bout of stunty spycraft with the Impossible Missions Force. McQuarrie reveals he's itching to push the blockbuster franchise in a new direction. "I think the biggest thing I learned is you don't always need as much as you think you do," he tells *Slashfilm* of his *MI:5* experience. "The motorcycle sequence was originally so much bigger, so much longer, and so much more involved. There were so many action sequences in the movie. You can make a bigger movie with less and I'm determined to do something leaner, less heavily reliant on plot, and a little stripped down." Word is *Rogue Nation's* **Rebecca Ferguson** will encore as the scene-stealing Isla Faust for the

sixth big-screen *Mission*, currently set for summer 2017.

ARE YOU MY MUMMY?

THE MUMMY

→ We'd heard whispers along the ancient Nile that the *Mummy* reboot would unwrap a female immortal in place of the traditional male monster. Now comes word that **Sofia Boutella** – the showstoppingly deadly Gazelle in *Kingsman: The Secret Service* and soon to be seen in *Star Trek Beyond* – is in the frame for the lead role, reinventing the Universal horror icon with a gender twist as part of the studio's masterplan for a shared creatureverse. Don't look for her to face down Tom Cruise, though – the star's reps have skewered rumours that recently linked him to the movie. No such denial from Angelina Jolie's people over reports of her being pursued for the *Bride Of Frankenstein* remake, mind... *The Mummy* is targeting a 24 March 2017 release with **Alex Kurtzman** helming the pyramid-powered thrills and chills.

THE NORSE AWAKENS!

THOR: RAGNAROK

→ Its title may promise the end of days but look for the thunder god's next adventure to deliver more of an offbeat vibe among all the hammer-hurling, Asgardian intrigue and blatant biceploration. Star **Chris Hemsworth** believes director **Taika Waititi** will bring a new voice to the franchise. "I think it needs to be injected with that sort of smart wit and unexpected kind of humour, kind of what James Gunn came in and did with *Guardians*," he tells *Cinema Blend*. "It was off-centre and unpredictable and I think we can definitely use a dose of that, you know. We've done regal, we've done Shakespeare... I think now it's time to go 'Okay, cool. Let's try something different,' and Taika just had such a brilliant take and funny kind of ideas about how we could do that." The movie has a new writer in **Stephany Folsom** and **Cate Blanchett** is linked to one of the female leads, possibly Marvel villainess Amora the Enchantress. **Tom Hiddleston** returns as Loki while **Mark Ruffalo** gives it some Hulk. ●

Worlds Of SFX

There's a whole universe to explore beyond this magazine



THIS MONTH ON gamesradar+

Five things to look out for on our massive entertainment portal at gamesradar.com/sfx

1 You can read our in-depth review of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* in this issue, but check out our review plus online at GamesRadar+ for loads more extras, including video reactions, fan pictures, opinion polls and more... <http://bit.ly/sfxstarforce>

2 If we're honest, we were a little sceptical about the new *Supergirl* TV show, but there's actually lots to like. Here's 10 reasons why Kara Danvers and co defy our expectations... <http://bit.ly/sfxgirl>

3 A new year, a new TV schedule. Make sure you know all about the best TV shows on Netflix with our round-up. Time for a marathon? <http://bit.ly/sfxnetflix>

4 *The Force Awakens* may be out, but that doesn't mean it can't be tweaked. Here's 20 things George Lucas changed about the original trilogy after the fact. Let's hope JJ Abrams doesn't do the same... <http://bit.ly/sfxforce20>

5 Find out how *Alien* inspired *Fear The Walking Dead* character Madison Clark. This is what was revealed when we sat down with the leading lady herself, Kim Dickens... <http://bit.ly/sfxalienwalking>



Magazines & Beyond

CRIME SCENE



Behold! The second issue of our new crime quarterly *Crime Scene* is upon us! This edition is a Scandinavian special, boasting two collectors' covers – choose from *The Bridge*'s

Sofia Helin and *Wallander*'s Kenneth Branagh. We've got big features on both, plus *Borgen*, *Beck*, Henning Mankell and your new favourite Icelandic show *Trapped*. We're on the sets of *Sherlock: The Abominable Bride* and *Fargo* season two, and interview Idris Elba for *Luther* and Sean Evans for *Endeavour*. And there's all the usual news, previews and reviews. Crimetastic! **ON SALE: NOW!**

THE SFX NEWSLETTER



to SFX's email newsletter, and you'll get a little bit of the mag in your inbox every Friday, with exclusive prize giveaways, a digest of the week's biggest genre news and the hottest features from GamesRadar+. What's not to like? It'll make that long wait for the weekend to get started that little bit easier to handle!
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TOTAL FILM



Obviously picking up the latest SFX is one of the highlights of your month, but your fix of the world's number one sci-fi and fantasy magazine doesn't have to end there. Sign up the future of the ever-expanding DC super-universe, clearing away the mists with Chris Pine in *The Finest Hours*, and much more. Plus a massive interview with Sir Patrick Stewart, a critical look back at the best of 2015, tons of behind-the-scenes gossip, and the most glittering reviews section the new year has to offer. Cross your newsgagent's palm with silver, dearie.
ON SALE: NOW!

J.J. ABRAMS: THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION



With *The Force Awakens* now here, what better time to celebrate the illustrious career of its director J.J. Abrams. From *Lost*, *Fringe* and *Alias* to *Mission: Impossible III*, *Star Trek* and *Cloverfield* we bring you interviews, behind-the-scenes glimpses and on-set reports from his TV and movie highlights. Plus, we check in with the cast and crew of *Episode VII* to reveal everything you need to know about that galaxy far, far away, and the biggest movie event of the decade. The Force is strong with this one.
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Next Issue

THE WALKING DEAD

WILL THINGS LOOK UP FOR DARYL IN THE SECOND HALF OF SEASON SIX?

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- + Richard Donner
- + Starcrash

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A stack of several SFX magazine issues. From top to bottom, the visible covers include:

- An issue featuring a woman in a dark sweater with the text 'AGENT CARTER' on it.
- An issue featuring a woman with long brown hair smiling.
- An issue titled 'LAW & ORDER: SVU' with a woman in a dark suit.
- An issue titled 'SUICIDE SQUAD' featuring a group of characters in costume.
- An issue titled 'CAPTAIN BOOMERANG' featuring a man in a mask.
- An issue titled 'KATANA' featuring a woman in a red and black outfit.
- An issue titled 'ENCHANTRESS' featuring a woman with long dark hair.
- An issue titled 'DIABLO' featuring a man in a horned mask.

Each page has some descriptive text and small images related to the featured content.



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/// SFX HAILING FREQUENCIES OPEN! ///

First Contact



THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

NICK SETCHFIELD,
FEATURES EDITOR



So that's another series of *Doctor Who* retreating into the space-time vortex, hybrids, Zygons, sonic sunnies and all. We asked you to break out your Confession Dials and tell us what you thought of the intergalactic shenanigans – and you obliged, sharing your views on a varied run of adventures that seems to have divided fandom down the middle (gawd, don't they all...). Drop a line to sfx@futurenet.com to give us your take on matters arising in the geekverse. We'll print the best and enrich your social standing.

SFX Hot Topic

Your views on the month's big issue

#WHAT DID YOU THINK OF DOCTOR WHO SERIES NINE?

✉ **Dan Shenton, email** Capaldi has begun to outshine his predecessors from the revived series and is even giving the classic Doctors a run for their money.

✉ **Martin Horn, email** Underwhelmed to say the least. I feel *Doctor Who* has lost my interest and that of my nine-year-old. Saturday evening TV is no longer Daddy/Daughter quality time, sadly, hiding behind the cushions together.

✉ **Doug Sims, email** Capaldi's monologue at the end of "The Zygon Inversion"... my god, that man can act. That speech gave me chills and the optimist in me hoped like hell that millions of children soaked it in like a sponge and on some level that it will stay with them.

✉ **Galgomite, GamesRadar+** They just haven't nailed a prevailing tone yet. Sometimes it's too adult, sometimes it's too childish, sometimes it's not as clever as the showrunner thinks it is.

✉ **Hazy, GamesRadar+** Put the show on hiatus for five years and come back refreshed with some new exciting ideas, not the insular dirges we've been served.

SFX Five years? Pah. Some of us lived through 16. Look at my scars! Look at them!

✉ **AbleScholar, GamesRadar+** The final arc, and the unleashing of the fury of the Time Lord, was perfectly played by all involved and the finale's final scenes put a lump in my throat. Jenna Coleman will be missed.

✉ **Richard Edward Lawrence, Facebook** Love the guitar, hated the specs, thrilled the Sonic is back.

✉ **Paul Morris, Facebook** If Capaldi wants to play the electric guitar, let him resign, and form his own band!

SFX Are you looking for a Dreamboys revival, by any chance? Is Craig Ferguson free?

✉ **Baz Hood, Facebook** The worst series since the revival for me. A brilliant actor in Capaldi, being mostly wasted with sub par material. ONE genuinely innovative episode in "Heaven Sent", followed by yet another underwhelming finale.

✉ **Mark Howe, Facebook** The return to Gallifrey should have been massive but was very underwhelming.



Pity we won't see this console every week.

**Get in touch!**@ Email sfx@futurenet.com •  Facebook [Facebook.com/SFXmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/SFXmagazine)@ Twitter [#SFXcontact](https://twitter.com/SFXmagazine) •  Post SFX, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

“Love the guitar, hate the specs, thrilled the Sonic is back”

✉ **Keith Tudor, email** It was great to see the cliffhangers back with the two-part format that dominated most of the run.

✉ **Neil Alsop, email** Time for Steven Moffat to move on, I think, before he drags a once-great series down even further and it ends up getting cancelled again, this time perhaps permanently.

✉ **Andrew James Spooner, Facebook** One of the most consistently wonderful and entertaining seasons of *Doctor Who* since its return.

✉ **Andy P Meakin, Facebook** After a few years of nonchalance towards the show, and feeling more and more that the *Who* of “my” childhood had gone forever (I am a child of the Tom Baker years), I’m now in love with the show once more – and more to the point, all my kids are loving it too (plus, anyone who says it isn’t scary anymore, try asking young kids what they think. My daughter has been hiding under a blanket at some episodes).

SFX Aw, Truly, there's nothing more heartwarming than the thought of terrified children, is there?

Look out for
the next SFX
Hot Topic at
bit.ly/SFXHotTopic

Just how many
arrows has Arrow
got to its bow?

**#COLEMAN CUTS
THE MUSTARD**

✉ **Timothy Williams, email** Wow, what a sour bunch [Hot Topic SFX 268 on Clara’s departure from *Doctor Who*]. Spiteful sneering, old regurgitated complaints, attempts to belittle, hopelessly inaccurate declarations of how awful she was and so on. The nastier, more insecure face of fandom, frankly. Now, I’d normally have sympathy for a letters editor picking from a limited choice of submissions. But not this time. Whoever chose them must have had some positive letters but they still almost entirely went for the negative. Even the positive ones that were picked included some reference to Clara being disliked, as if that were the norm. And that’s actually rather unpleasant. Because if someone writes in with something as ridiculous as “Clara has no personality” out of spite, you only print it if you either think they have a point (in which case, frankly, you’re an idiot) or you want to validate that spite to sell your magazine (which is, frankly, little despicable.) Either way, it’s easy for your magazine to wind up looking out of touch with the majority of your readers. (A tribute to Clara posted on the show’s official facebook page after “Face

The Raven” aired has been “liked” nearly 78,000 times. That’s what *Doctor Who* viewers think of her.) Now, having said all that, I suppose I can appreciate there were limited messages to choose from, and sometimes only people who want to moan write in. But you must have had more choice than that.

SFX We try to be as balanced as we can, Timothy – and Doctor Who’s one of those shows that attracts nuclear-level passion, on both sides. Personally I think Clara’s one of the best companions we’ve ever had and the negativity makes my brain boggle. Can you imagine how poor old Adric would have fared in the Twitter age?

#NEAT TRICK

✉ **Mike Garner, email** Arrow is now dealing with magic, the kind of thing that could have killed the series if they had started out with it. Magic on TV comes across as cheesy a lot of the time (CGI on the small screen, with a small-screen budget can look, well, crap). The journey Arrow has gone on though means magic just seems like the next logical step. Then along came Constantine. Firstly the short-lived show got the right actor, they just missed the mark →

This gives us an idea:
a story where the
Doctor meets Elvis!



First Contact

Mar 2016

Perhaps *Dominion* was a bit on the overmanned side...



with the show. So for that character to turn up on *Arrow* could have been a step too far. What has happened though is one of the greatest guest star appearances ever. It's such a shame it was a one off. *Constantine* could have been a character that showed up on *The Flash* and *Supergirl* too, connecting all the shows together without having to have the main cast swap shows. The mardy English mage should live on!

SFX I don't think we've seen the last of the most iconic crumpled raincoat since *Columbo*'s...

#QUACK OFF

✉ Ant Pugh, email The latest issue of *SFX* states that Disney have had little influence on the new *Star Wars* movie. If that is the case then why do the new Stormtrooper helmets look like Donald Duck's beak? I keep expecting all the troopers to say "Aw, phooey!" whenever they get shot.

SFX Now we think about it there's a definite hint of Daffy Duck about Kylo Ren. "You're dethpicable, Thkywalker!"

#PAST: PERFECT

✉ Larry Conway, email Robert Graham's letter [SFX 268] on how the BBC treats *Orphan Black* has valid points but he makes a mistake branding

the days of early evening showings as a sign of disrespect to the genre. From the days of *Def II* (remember that?) showing repeats of classics like *The Invaders*, *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century* and the original *Battlestar Galactica*, to modern hits like *Buffy* and *Farscape*, *Star Trek* in most of its forms (original, *TNG*, *DS9* and *Voyager*) and, lest we forget the repeats of *Doctor Who* that were for a long time the only showings the show had during its exile from our screens. What do we have now? Perhaps the most tedious quiz show ever in the form of *Eggheads* and various other shows that should be on at daytime (*Two Tribes* gets a pass as a cousin of mine was on it and won) and not early evening. Perhaps we should think back to those days and see how lucky we were...

SFX It was a golden age, Larry. A golden slot. Even the thought of Normski makes me feel strangely nostalgic...

#WE ALSO HEARD FROM

✉ Stephen McAfee, email So, *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. What a trailer! I actually got goosebumps... DOOMSDAY!!! My fanboy side has excitement levels I can't contain. Can't even focus to do my staff's wages...

SFX Focus, Stephen! Your staff are relying on you!

✉ Harold Okafor-Withers, email I checked out the Manchester-based For The Love Of The Force

“My fanboy side has excitement levels I can't contain”



Your sci-fi memorabilia valued by the experts from auctioneers Vectis

→ Mark Cordory sent us some of his Major Matt Mason Mattel figures, including a rare Scorpio. “These are toys from my childhood – still in pretty much near-mint condition, with even a few fragments from the original packaging cut out and stuck to the biscuit tins they now live in. I still get a small nostalgia rush when I open the tins.”



ESTIMATED VALUE
£80-£120

KATHY TAYLOR OF VECTIS SAYS:
Produced in 1969/70, Scorpio is bigger than the Major Matt Mason astronauts at over seven inches tall. Scorpio was constructed using a rubber compound-covered wire armature encased in a plastic exoskeleton torso. His face is illuminated via a blinking light bulb.

This is the hardest of all the Matt Mason characters to locate. Made in the final year of the production, there were very few produced in relation to the astronauts and other aliens. Loose it's worth £80-£120, but a mint boxed version could fetch £500-£700.

If you've got a piece of memorabilia you'd like us to feature, send us a photo of your item with a few words about what it means to you, to sfx@futurenet.com, using the subject line Cash In The AT-AT.

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NEW STAR TREK TV SHOW

As its 50th anniversary approaches, *Star Trek* is boldly going back to TV

Wishlist

WHAT YOU WANT TO SEE IN UPCOMING MOVIES AND TV

Illustration by Paul Garner

YOUR TOP 5 REQUESTS

WASH THOSE VULCAN EARS OUT, CBS. OUR READERS HAVE A FEW IDEAS FOR YOUR NEW STAR TREK SERIES

PRIME UNIVERSE

1 Despite a few calls for a movie-crew *Trek* TV show the vast majority of you wanted to see a return to the pre-JJ Abrams prime universe, but after the events of *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space 9* and *Voyager*. **Pete MacKenzie** even has a specific period in mind: "NCC-1701-R or above. The history of the future to 2387 is pretty well documented, not to mention a bit boring."

SPACESHIP, NOT SPACE STATION

2 Simple one this, you want the new crew to embark on a multi-year mission exploring strange new worlds, which means a mobile vessel not a stationary, er, station. **Andy Kinnear** is already thinking about who can design the new ship. "Bring back artists like Rick Sternbach, Michael Okuda and Alex Jaeger to design the ships and tech."

TACKLE BIG SOCIAL ISSUES

3 *The Original Series* is rightly praised for the way it tackled hot-button social

topics. You'd like the new series to do the same. "Classic alien races, flawed characters, current social issues tackled in a fantastical way. Everything that made *The Original Series*, *Next Gen* and *DS9* so good," says **Keith Tudor**.

BUT KEEP IT FUN

4 "Whatever they do, I'd like it to have a sense of fun and adventure like the Abrams movies," says **HornetPrime**. "Tell meaningful stories with social commentary and allegory, but give it some humour to balance it out."

NEW ALIEN SPECIES AND TECH

5 The Klingons and Borg are great and all, but new threats are a must, and you wouldn't mind seeing some shiny new future-tech either. "I would really like to see some new aliens, both allies to the crew and villains," says **Gary Pratt**, while **Mark Birchenough** adds: "Future tech. We've caught up with *The Next Gen* in many ways, I'd like to see stuff that makes me go 'wow'."

And that's not all they want...

→ **MediumAtomicWeight** Let the kids rule! I want to see Captain Naomi Wildman boldly going where no brat has gone before, with her Number One, Nog and chief medical officer Molly O'Brien. Did I mention Wesley Crusher is the Federation president?

→ **Garry Clark** It will be interesting to see where the series will be set: ship, station, maybe a planet!

→ **Steven John** No lens flare.

→ **Gareth Eardley** Decent scripts.

→ **Ian Gleeson** A nice big war like in *DS9*, with more fleet battles please.

→ **Robert Elliott** A visit to the Tribble homeworld.

→ **Jeb Bearstone** To have me as the voice of the computer.

→ **Sir Douglas Strider** More Mirror

Universe-focused, but with less hammy acting and more goatees.

→ **Boulet Mustafa** To learn Ben Sisko's fate.

→ **John McIntosh** Dame Maggie Smith in charge of the Excelsior (the transwarp drive, the bitchy lines... squeal).

→ **Paul Baker** Tighter costumes.

→ **John O'Malley** Green alien babes pole dancing! Oh and, ahem, decent scripts of course.

→ **Matt Wilko** Section 31 versus temporal affairs.

→ **David Cole** I'd like a continuation of the movie franchise featuring Kirk and company during the five-year mission.

→ **Radioman** We don't want the JJ universe, we don't want a prequel

and we don't want any reference to *Enterprise*.

→ **Maxhan** Not in the new timeline. Follow on from *TNG*. Or make the Pocket Books canon.

→ **Smoke2049** I believe and hope this will be set in the prime universe and I believe this is more than likely going to be the case. That being said I think the possibility of running another *Star Trek* show concurrently set in the Abrams universe would also be an awesome idea.

→ **mrikaweb** What I would like to see is a show not kept behind an American-only pay wall. [Ed – don't worry, we'd be very surprised if no one snaps up *Trek* for UK television]



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See bit.ly/SFXwishlist for details.

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YOUR DREAM CAST

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122

THE PASSION

by Jeanette Winterson, 1987

Author **Charlie Fletcher** celebrates an enduring historical fantasy



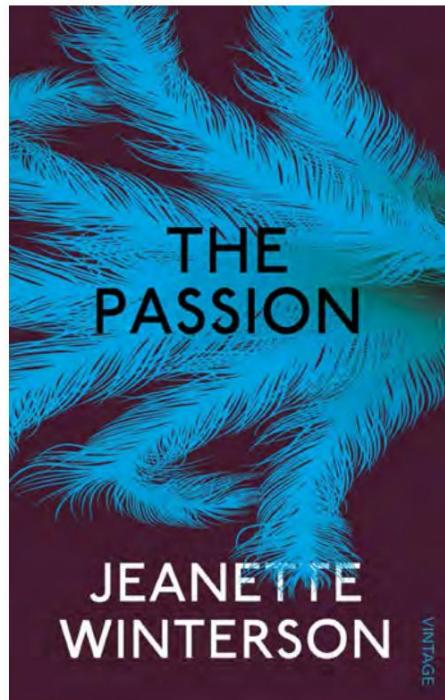
I fell in love with Jeanette

Winterson by mistake. I picked up her first book *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* exactly 30 years ago, solely based on the striking

Pandora Press cover art (by Sue Sluglett), and added it to a pile of other books I was buying thinking it'd be good to break out of my unleavened diet of genre novels. I took a punt, thinking that if I didn't take to it in the first few pages, it would make a nice-looking present for a friend with a looming birthday. The fact I still have that edition and can flip it to find the name of the illustrator tells its own story.

The Passion, which she wrote two years later, is in every sense of the word a wonderful novel. Genre-wise, I can't tell you where precisely it sits on the spectrum between historical fantasy and magical realism, but I do know that it's a true classic of imaginative fiction, a good tale, perfectly told in two voices: that of Henri, the young soldier whose burning love for Napoleon turns to hate on the cold road to Moscow, and of Villanelle, cross-dressing web-footed daughter of a Venetian boatman. Their stories take us all over the map of Europe, at the same time humanely and honestly charting the smaller and more intricate topography of the human heart.

Henri's journey takes him from the happy fields of his rustic childhood to the furthest extent of his hero's imperial adventure in Russia, at which point the two strands intersect and head south to warmer, if not entirely happier climes. The descriptions of the Grande Armée's suffering during what he calls the "Zero Winter" have stayed with me, especially the memorably horrible image of a cavalryman



who slits his horse's belly to put his feet in for warmth, only to wake finding his horse has frozen round him and that his comrades, unable to free him, must leave him screaming in the snow.

The world of Villanelle's Venice is bought to life as a living, shifting, fugitive place – a watery city that wears as many masks as its inhabitants. Villanelle takes her boat through this place of mazes, taking us into "the city within the city" where the rats run and the unseen survive.

Thirty years later I have not shaken the image of the old woman, once rich, who lives on a watery step draped in the rotting curtains she tore from her palazzo as she left, her hair now green with slime from the walls around her and wreathed with a crown of dead rats.

What I really love, beyond the imagination, the compelling narrative and the characters whose fates you come to care desperately about is something much more mundane. I just like Winterson's voice, and two aspects of it especially: she uses plain language to evoke the most visionary and unworldly things, which makes those fantastic elements entirely real. And above all there's a quality of wild decency in her writing. She's imaginatively tough and uncompromisingly honest.

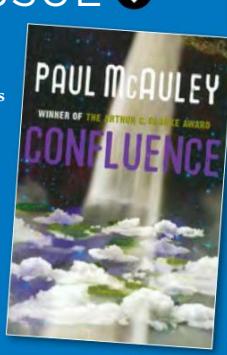
The Passion stands up three decades later. On a re-read it seems different, richer even. The things that broke my heart when I first read it don't now. Or not as much. The observation that passion is survivable doesn't seem a betrayal at all. It just seems part of the wider enduring gamble that is life. As Villanelle says, "You play, you win, you play, you lose. You play." As a reader, I'm glad Winterson is still in the game.

It's a short book. If you love reading – hell, if you just have a working heart – read it. ●

The Paradox, the latest book in Charlie Fletcher's Oversight trilogy, is out now. He is also the author of the Stoneheart trilogy.

NEXT ISSUE ↓

In SFX 271 (on sale 3 February), author Stephen Baxter looks back at Paul McAuley's *Child Of The River*, *Ancients Of Days* and *Shrine Of Stars* – aka his Arthur C Clarke Award-winning *Confluence* trilogy. This is your chance to give the trilogy a re-read before seeing what a top author has to say about the novels.



Like this? Try these!

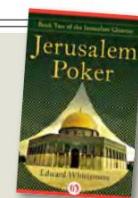
DEATHLESS
by CATHERYNNE M VALENTE (2013)

→ A pretty damn magical retelling of the history of Stalinist Russia, cleverly re-imagined as a fairytale. Another classic.



JERUSALEM POKER
by EDWARD WHITTEMORE (1978)

→ The second of the unappreciated *Jerusalem Quartet*, about a 12-year game of poker played for the secret control of the ancient city. Mad genius.



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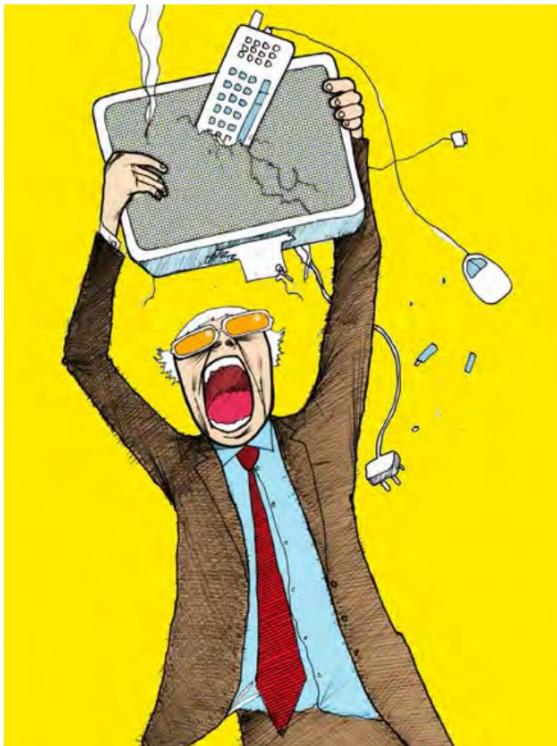
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CRASH!

Computer mishaps have got **David Langford** remembering



“PAUSING ONLY
FOR A CHORUS
OF ‘DAISY,
DAISY’, IT DIED
A HORRIBLE
DEATH”

→ Illustration by Andy Watt

Things in life which are no fun at all include returning from a convivial SF convention (Novacon in Nottingham, since you ask) and exhaustedly trying to catch up on writing deadlines – only for the computer to murmur “I’m sorry, I can’t do that” and, pausing only for a brief chorus of “Daisy, Daisy”, to die a horrible death.

Of course I have lots of backups (he said unconvincingly), but the time it takes to get it all together on a new machine is... well, the great crash was a week ago and everything is still what in the technical jargon of computer geeks is termed higgledy-piggledy.

Losing access to my vast email archive, even temporarily, is like being in one of these novels that start off with the famous cliché of lumbering the hero with amnesia: Philip José Farmer’s *The Maker Of Universes*, Colin Kapp’s *The Patterns Of Chaos*, Robert Silverberg’s *Lord Valentine’s Castle* and many more. From the writer’s point of view this is dead convenient, since rather than organising infodumps of background data (“Tell me again, as though I knew nothing of it”) they can let readers follow the protagonist on the journey of learning what he needs to know – or rather, what the author wants readers to know.

Gene Wolfe has an interesting twist on amnesia in his *Soldier In The Mist*, whose hero Latro’s recent memories keep vanishing overnight, forcing him to write down everything he might need to know in the days to come. The novel consists of what he writes.

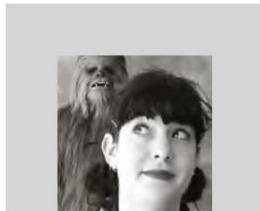
Some characters, like Latro, lose their memories through the traditional knock on the head; I’m not sure there’s any medical justification for the handy plot device, much older than SF, that they can be instantly cured by an equal but opposite knock on the other side of the head. Others suffer insidious memory edits inflicted by bad guys or Men in Black. I couldn’t help cheering when, on being told by an extraterrestrial that he knows too much and must suffer memory erasure, the hero of Lloyd Biggle Jr’s *All The Colours Of Darkness* is grumpily unsurprised: “Aliens always erase the memory. We have a substantial literature on that subject.”

Something else that occasionally erases minds is Knowledge Too Awful To Contemplate – a problem for any HP Lovecraft character who even glimpses the Great Old Slimy Ones or Donald Trump.

On the other side of the coin from all those unfortunates with amnesia are the lucky sods who remember *everything* in excruciating detail. The hero of Robert Heinlein’s YA *Starman Jones* soon loses the valuable books of astrogation tables he inherited from an uncle, but it’s okay because he read them once and can recall every figure, every decimal point. SF has many other characters with photographic memories, like the Microfilm Mind in Charles Harness’s *The Paradox Men*, or the Mentats in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. But one author thought this particular superpower wouldn’t be a blessing. The mental prodigy of Jorge Luis Borges’s “Funes the Memorious” performs amazing feats of memory but is deeply dysfunctional, lost in a blizzard of tiny details. Can’t see the wood for the trees.

All the same, I could use one of those clever chaps to help restore my data... ●

David Langford’s latest proof that SF has conquered the world is a restaurant review in The Independent that sensuously reports: “A helping of kale lay over the chicken like a drunken trifff.”



SPACED: OUT

Bonnie Burton is happy to keep her feet on the ground



“IF IT
HAPPENED TO
MATT DAMON IN
THE MARTIAN,
IT CAN HAPPEN
TO ANYONE”

→ Illustration by Maria Colino

When most kids first saw *Doctor Who* they wanted to hop in the first blue police box they could find and spin off to another galaxy. Kids my age dreamt of travelling with Han in the Millennium Falcon, or working alongside boffins on the USS Enterprise.

As much as I love all these sci-fi franchises, the last thing I'd ever want to do is travel in outer space for real. Stars are pretty to stare at and make up fun-sounding constellation names for. But I don't have an urge to wear a cool astronaut suit and launch myself into a galaxy far, far away. Sure, I'm eager to meet aliens from distant planets... when they come here to Earth. I don't need to search them out. The idea of not knowing if a new planet has breathable air or human-eating plant life scares the crap out of me.

Space horror movies like *Alien*, *Event Horizon* and *The Last Days On Mars* remind us that there are million ways us puny humans can die in zero gravity. It could be angry creatures using us as their own egg hotel, or a supernatural force that possesses us to kill each other on a space station. Or even worse, space zombies!

On this planet, you have an endless amount of ways to survive an attack from the undead or a vengeful ghost or even an insane co-worker. But in space, you can only go where the oxygen is. That could mean a ship, a space station or the very astronaut suit you'd be wearing.

Maybe you just happen to be the kind of astronaut who was accidentally marooned on Mars when your ship left the planet without you. After all, if it happened to Matt Damon in *The Martian*, it can happen to anyone. At least now I know how to grow potatoes in Mars soil so I can survive. This movie will affect a whole new generation of fans who will apply for an astronaut gig at NASA. I had the opposite reaction. In my perfect world, we get to stay on this one.

In December 2015, NASA released information on how to officially apply to be an astronaut. You don't need any flying or military experience. There's no need to get a Masters or PhD to be an astronaut; a Bachelor's degree in a science, maths, engineering or technology focus will do. There are no age restrictions either. Astronaut candidates in the past have ranged between ages of 26 and 46, with 34 being the average age. But there is a physical exam you have to pass before they slingshot you into space. You must be able to see objects close and far away with near 20/20 vision. You have to be between 62 and 75 inches tall. And you better be as calm as Yoda, because if your blood pressure exceeds 140/90 in a sitting position, they don't want you on board.

Astronaut training is no walk in the park either. Candidates are required to complete military water survival, a flying syllabus, and become SCUBA qualified to prepare them for spacewalk training. There is also a test where you have to swim while wearing your astronaut suit. Astronauts are also expected to learn how to operate each system, to identify malfunctions, and find a number of solutions to help correct the problems as they arise.

But all that sounds like way too much work when I can just sit on my sofa and wait for alien races to invade. No I'm not pro-probing. I just don't think we need to poke and prod our way through space when we can just be patient in knowing that if aliens want to hang out with us they will. ●

Bonnie could be thought of as lazy but at least she's still breathing Earth air.



Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

GHOST GIRL-FIGHT

→ In a mashup of terrifying vs terrible, an April Fools' viral is set to become reality with '90s J-horror hair-off *Sadako Vs Kayako*. The movie, pitting the vengeful girl-ghosts of *Ring* and *The Grudge* against each other, is set for a June 2016 release in Japan. It'll be directed by Koji Shiraishi, who made 2009's grim sex-pest-fest *Grotesque*, which is banned in the UK. All of which points to this being rubbish. But I can't deny the teaser clip, with Kayako's hand reaching over Sadako's well gave me chills. I'm trying to neutralise my nerves by imagining little Toshio from *The Grudge* as a "Ring Girl" carrying the numbers of upcoming rounds while Sadako and Kayako mope in the corners in nighties and boxing gloves.

TREES OF LIFE

→ A more promising Japan-set horror is *The Forest*, out 26 February starring Natalie Dormer. It's set in the real-life Aokigahara forest at the base of Mount Fuji, a place notorious as a suicide venue and reputedly the home of dark spirits. Dormer plays an American woman in search of her missing twin sister, who ventures into the forest and ill-advisedly ignores warnings not to stray from the path. Bizarrely, this is the first of two suicide forest horrors slated for 2016 – the second, from Portugal, is *A Floresta Das Almas Perdidas* (*The Forest Of The Lost Souls*), also set in a notorious suicide venue, this time about two people who've apparently lost the will to live who meet in the forest. It's a coming-of-age which devolves into a '70s slasher – definitely straying off the path.

LIVING DOLL

→ Also out in February, *The Boy*, where a nanny is employed to babysit a child which turns out to be a life-sized doll. Furnished with a set of rules (do not cover his face, do not forget to feed him, do not leave him alone) which she flagrantly ignores, before you can say "FFS Gremlins!!!" everything goes a bit *Child's Play*. Directed by William Brent Bell, who made 2012's *The Devil Inside*, it has a tantalising trailer but I fear the film will be disappointing. *The Devil Inside* made \$102m off a \$1m budget

On toy boys, girl ghosts battling it out and a terrifying new trend



The Boy done bad, we're guessing.



In need of a hand? Try *Sadako Vs Kayako*.



Don't go down to *The Forest* today...

even though no one liked it – watch this space for an influx of doll movies. Meanwhile, if you have Netflix, why not check out Lucky McKee's *May*, a slow-burn, creepy indie about a young woman with a lazy eye who has a doll in a glass box for a best friend. It stars Angela Bettis, who years later would have her face bitten off in McKee's *The Woman*, and *Scary Movie*'s Anna Faris as a veterinarian's receptionist.

INTO THE DARK

→ The annual Sundance film festival is about to land and with it the Midnight selection, an armful of genre world premieres that in previous years have included the best horrors of the year. *The Babadook*, *What We Do In The Shadows* and next year's *The Witch* all launched there. This year nine movies have been announced, including Rob Zombie's latest *31*, Kevin Smith's latest *Yoga Hosers*, a new one by *Excision* director Richard Bates Jr called *Trash Fire*, and a Brit/Iranian Farsi-language political horror called *Under The Shadow*. Then there's *The Blackout Experiments* by a director called Rich Fox. Unclear if it's part documentary, this is an exploration of an underground trend called Blackout. These are elite haunted houses in the US that are less a bloke in a mask waving a leaf blower (which I adore) and more rape-simulation, suffocation and sticking your hand in a bog full of fake vom. This is extreme, experiential stuff which forces you to question your own reaction to real-ish horror. Keep your eyes out for screening reactions late January, and approach Blackout itself with caution. ☀

Dreadful thing to watch

→ Frightfest Presents continues. From 29 February teacher terror *The Lesson* and subverted slasher *Last Girl Standing* are available to download, then from 7 March controversial concepter *Landmine Goes Click*, multi-dimensional mayhem *Curtain*, haunted-houser *The Unfolding* and babysitter thriller *Emelie*. <http://bit.ly/sfxfright>.



**FREESPEAK**

WHERE WRITERS AND OPINIONS COLLIDE

There's too much science fiction! Good! argues **Tom Hunter**

**Hitchhikers:** just one corner of a huge universe.

The world of science fiction today is big. Really big. You just won't believe how vastly, hugely, mindbogglingly big it is, and the chances are the bits of SF I love the most right now are going to be things you've never even heard of.

We're creating and consuming more SF&F cultural material than ever before, and it only takes a quick flick through this magazine to know that our chances of ever keeping up are doomed to beautiful failure.

How lucky we are!

And yet there's a growing problem in the midst of this abundance. For instance the recent debacle surrounding the hijacking of the Hugo Awards was caused by a small contingent of writers and their fans protesting that their particular favourite works were being overlooked.

If you tried really, really hard to ignore all the ugliness that sprang from that and boiled it down to just that simple argument you might fool yourself into thinking they had a point, but hold on! None of my favourite works were nominated for a Hugo this year either. Or you know, much ever.

In the UK alone there's a couple of hundred new books of genre interest published every year. A truly dedicated reader might read upwards of 50 books a year (I did a survey) but even then only a portion will be from the current year.

It is, of course, hugely probable that all of our personal favourite stuff will never win any awards. Heck, I've been running the UK's main science fiction book prize for the best part of a decade and my favourites still don't win. Am I in a secret conspiracy against myself? I think not. Are the books that do win utterly awesome? You bet. Do judges sneak through my bookshelves at night swapping out my favourites for theirs? If only it were that easy.

The truth is your favourite SF and mine are likely not the same, but this realisation shouldn't be the spark for another flame war. As the limits of our science fiction culture continue to grow, we all owe it to ourselves to grow up along with it. There's simply too much good stuff out there in the universe for us to do otherwise. ●

Tom Hunter is the director of the Arthur C Clarke Award for SF literature. www.clarkeaward.com

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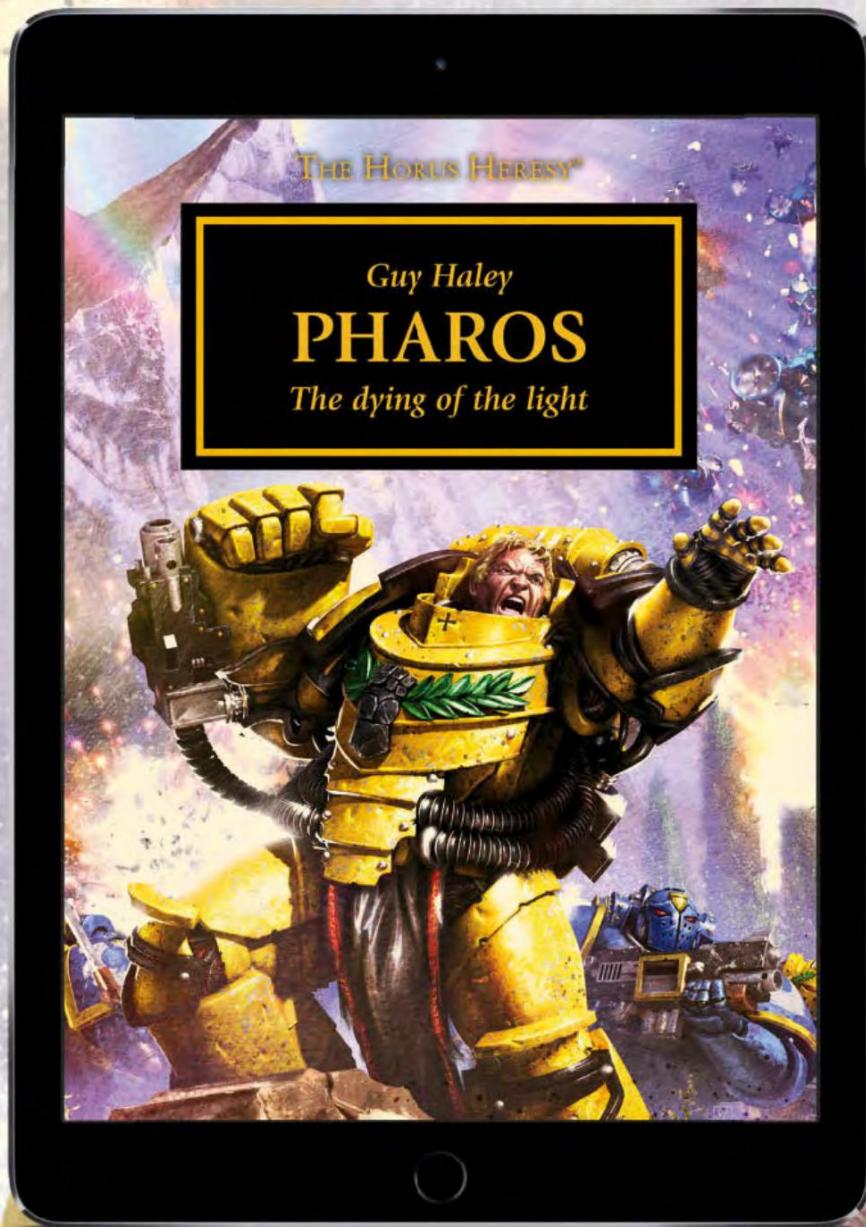
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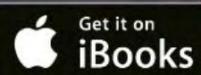
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LEGENDS OF TOMORROW





“It’s ideas that are nuts!” Joseph McCabe discovers the DC TV Universe’s craziest, most ambitious show yet...

LEGEND BUILDING

For four years, DC comic book fans have been treated to the truest live-action superhero adaptations ever to grace television screens. Starting with *Arrow*, focused on the Emerald Archer of Star City, and continuing with *The Flash*, chronicling the adventures of Central City’s Scarlet Speedster, the DC TV Universe has transported audiences through time, across alternate universes, and even introduced them to telepathic gorillas. But it’s now upped the stakes still further, giving us a weekly series devoted to an entire team of costumed characters. Meet the Legends of Tomorrow.

“I wrote a line the other day for Ray Palmer,” says *Arrow* and now *Legends* executive producer Marc Guggenheim, referring to *Legends*’ resident CEO turned adventurer, best known as the Atom (embodied by Brandon Routh). “I’m not sure if it will end up in a cut or anything, but it was, ‘Ten-year-old me is having a moment.’ That pretty much just came from me. Ten-year-old me can’t believe this. It’s insane. It is literally a dream come true. It would be a dream come true just to be watching the show.”

HECK OF A LINE-UP

Part of Guggenheim’s amazement stems from the roster of *Legends*, a smorgasbord of fan favourite characters from both *Arrow* and *The Flash*. In addition to Atom, the team’s founding membership consists of Captain Cold (Wentworth Miller), Firestorm (Franz Drameh and Victor Garber), Hawkgirl (Ciara Renée), Hawkman (Falk Hentschel), Heat Wave (Dominic Purcell), and Black Canary turned White Canary (Caity Lotz). All of them united by time master Rip Hunter (Arthur Darvill) to battle the immortal Vandal Savage (Casper Crump).

“It was like, really, you’re really letting us do this? And you don’t need a script?!” Guggenheim says of the reaction he and his fellow execs Greg Berlanti and Andrew Kreisberg had towards Warner Brothers’ decision. “This is insane. Not to get all sentimental about it, but it was very humbling.” →



HEART OF THE ATOM

Brandon Routh on *Legends'* Tiny Titan...

Ray Palmer evolved tremendously on *Arrow*. Will he now assume a leadership role in *Legends*?

Overall leadership, yeah, I think Ray may want to take on some of that responsibility, being that he was the CEO of a company, and has done all that and knows the best qualities about a team. I don't know how that's gonna work for him when he's got Heat Wave and Captain Cold to deal with, and Canary, who might be a little deranged. That might frustrate him. But he'll at least try to take on that role and be the brains next to Dr Stein.

Has Ray toughened up since we last saw him?

He knows a little bit more about what it's like to be a hero. In his few adventures since his first encounter with Oliver, he's learned that it takes more than brains and a suit. You have to have a little bit of a strategy and a little bit of physical prowess in knowing how to fight, in case that's the last line of defence.

What's it like to work with the cast of *Legends*?

This is perfect, to share the screen with a lot of very talented people, who will all get the limelight a little bit. It's not just one superhero per show. It's seven or eight, however many we may have, on one show. The possibilities are endless. And as they keep bringing more new characters into *Arrow* and *The Flash*, they'll show up on our show. So it's a self-feeding machine.



Energy drinks perhaps?



You're gonna be so hot!



They haven't learnt to "assemble" like the Avengers just yet.



Bad fearsome enough to warrant such a conglomeration of heroes and antiheroes was the first order of business...

GLOBAL AMBITIONS

"Vandal's aspiration is nothing smaller than taking over the entire world. I've made no secret, at least with the writers, of my incredible affection for [comic writer] Mike Baron's take on Vandal, from the first two issues of the Wally West *Flash*, with Jackson Guice drawing him. I'm massively influenced by that. I can't speak for the other writers, but I don't think I'm writing any other version of Vandal."

The man playing the ages-old supervillain, introduced in 2015's *Arrow-Flash* crossover two-parter ("Legends Of Today" and "Legends Of Yesterday") is, according to Guggenheim, a "classic" by casting director David Rapaport.

"The thing about David is he always brings you the best person first. Stephen Amell was the very first person to walk in the casting room for *Arrow*. He always just knows who exactly we should cast. Casper was the first guy he brought to us. It was like, 'Done. Perfect!' He gave a great audition. He looks the part but he also acts the part. He's got that level of both malevolence and cultured gravitas that we needed for Vandal. We couldn't be more thrilled."

"When the idea for a second spin-off came up and we were talking about it we were very cognisant that we didn't want to repeat ourselves," Kreisberg tells *SFX*. "There wasn't an appetite on the part of the audience to watch us repeat ourselves. And we really wanted something different. *Arrow*'s amazing and huge and awesome, and *The Flash* was somehow bigger in scope. We were like, 'What could be bigger than *The Flash*?' That was really where the idea of a team came up. But rather than it just being a collection of heroes, having some wild cards in there and having some characters of questionable morality became part of it. We started talking a lot about *Ocean's Eleven* and *The Dirty Dozen*, and, for me, *The Guns Of Navarone*, where there are two leaders of the team and one's got a blood debt to kill the other one.

"So it was about taking those classic tropes and applying them to the superhero genre. And to see if we could pull that off and have a show that exists within our other shows' universe. As always we set the bar very high for ourselves, and hopefully we'll just clear it again this time. My takeaway from what we've been doing so far is... On *Flash* and *Arrow* we always have these ideas and then somebody will go, 'We can't do that. That's nuts.' Well, all *Legends* is 'That's nuts.' It's ideas that are nuts."

Nuts or not, Guggenheim says picking a Big



Firestorm, Hawkman, Hawkgirl and White Canary wait around for the action to start.

“WE REALLY WANTED SOMETHING DIFFERENT WITH THIS SPIN-OFF”

Legends Of Tomorrow will further distinguish itself from its forbears by altering both its format and principal cast with each successive season.

“The one thing we’ve said is each season – or even if we do a 22-episode season next year and we break it up – each arc has to be its own thing. Its own movie with its own concept and its own *raison d'être*, and its own set of characters. Which is not to say that every arc is gonna completely reboot. But what’s fun about the concept is because it’s a team concept we can rotate people in and out depending upon what the actors want to do and what our storytelling needs are. There’s a lot of flexibility there. Which is kind of nice. It’s not gonna be an anthology like *American Horror Story*, where each season is a completely different concept. But it’s gonna have a different idea behind it. Time travel is the idea behind season one. The next arc, whenever that is, will have

its own big idea behind it.”

As for what Guggenheim is most excited for fans to see when *Legends* premieres in January 2016, the exec teases, “In the first hour, seeing all these characters together is really the cachet of the show, and I’m really looking forward to the first time that team is assembled on camera in action together. Then there’s a moment in the second hour that’s pretty amazing, that I’m looking forward to fans seeing. But I’m gonna be very vague about it.”

In the meantime, Guggenheim reveals to *SFX* the challenge now facing *Legends'* writing staff...

“Part of the problem with breaking the stories for the show is that we’ll get together and, every five minutes, we’re just saying how crazy-insane it is, and then we’ll lose five minutes talking about how insane it is before we come back to doing the actual work.” ●

Legends Of Tomorrow begins on The CW in the US on 21 January and Sky 1 in the UK TBC.

GETTY (2)



CRY OF THE WHITE CANARY

Caity Lotz, the First Lady of *Legends*, sings...

What was your reaction when you heard Arrow's Sara Lance was returning for *Legends Of Tomorrow*?

“I was dead. I was done. It was like, ‘C'est la vie. I don't want to be on your show anyway!’ Then it was a couple of months later that Andrew and Marc called me into their office and were like, ‘We have some news.’ I wasn’t expecting this. I was like, ‘They already have Arrow and Flash. How would they do another spin-off?’ Then to hear the cast I was gonna be working with – Victor Garber, Brandon, and Wentworth... it was really exciting.”

Did the fans bring Sara back?

“If she died and everyone was like, ‘Eh, whatever,’ I’m sure they wouldn’t have bothered resurrecting her. But a lot of people connected with her. She’s a well-written, cool character. She’s a tough, international, sexually open assassin. But she’s definitely not just a cold-hearted bitch [laughs]. She’s a very emotional but just kind of torn and tormented character.”

How would you describe this group's dynamic?

“It’s a mash-up. It’s heroes and villains. It’s not like, ‘Yay, Power Rangers!’ It’s definitely a mismatched group who does not work well together, united by a common cause. Our Bad, Vandal Savage, is a *bad guy*, who’s lived for thousands of years. So it’s basically like, we’re all gonna die unless we work together [laughs]. So we’ve got to. But there’s gonna be a lot of conflict within the team-up.”

Everything has been building towards this movie!"

According to Rob Liefeld, who first introduced Deadpool to an unsuspecting audience in *New Mutants* #98, the Merc With A Mouth has always been "ridiculously popular". Released at the height of the '90s comic book boom, his subsequent appearance in *X-Force* #1 sold a staggering four million copies.

Among the most cosplayed characters at comic conventions, he has since maintained his high profile through significant appearances in videogames like *Marvel Vs Capcom* and the Marvel Lego range, not to mention fan-favourite runs on his monthly comics by creators such as Joe Kelly, Ed McGuinness, Christopher Priest and Cullen Bunn. Now exactly 25 years later he's set to explode onto the big screen in his first solo film.

"This wasn't planned but he debuted in February 1991 and now the *Deadpool* movie is coming out in February 2016, so the film will hit on his 25th anniversary," says Liefeld. "When I first told Ryan Reynolds about that, he was like 'wow, that's cool!'"



The New Mutants #98 – the first appearance of Deadpool.



INTO THE MOUTH OF MADNESS

With the *Deadpool* movie about to hit creator Rob Liefeld tells Stephen Jewell about the Merc With A Mouth's early days



Deadpool's move to *X-Force* saw millions of copies sold.



Having cut his teeth on DC's Hawk and Dove, Liefeld took over as regular penciller on *New Mutants* with #86 in early 1990. Handed full creative control with #98, he brought in Fabian Nicieza as co-writer who would later play a crucial role in Deadpool's development. "Fabian is great with dialogue, and the voice that he gave Deadpool really stuck, as he was such a great wise-ass," recalls Liefeld, who wanted Deadpool to emulate Marvel's most natural-born joker. "When I first pitched the character to Marvel, it was 'Spider-Man with guns and swords.'"

However, Liefeld is quick to dismiss the suggestion that Deadpool owes anything to DC supervillain Deathstroke. "You know what, buddy? We haven't heard that before," he laughs, insisting that Deadpool's real name Wade Wilson was not a nod to Deathstroke's alter ego, Slade Wilson. "Deadpool doesn't move like Deathstroke, and I always tell people to go back and look at *X-Force* #2 with the first whole pages of Deadpool. He's doing flying kicks and moving like a ninja – he's moving like Spider-Man! Deathstroke is a lumbering guy in chain-mail and buccaneer boots and gloves, who is blue and orange, so how do you get from that to Deadpool's blue and red?"



The Deadpool Corps included KidPool and Lady Deadpool.

Having first seen *Star Wars* in 1977 when he was nine years old, another of Liefeld's inspirations came from a galaxy far, far away. "One of the closest things to Deadpool in terms of a pop culture icon is Boba Fett," says Liefeld, who sent away for an action figure of the bounty hunter before eventually catching his cameo in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

"He had about two lines and was all mysterious, but he didn't do much. Then in *Return Of The Jedi*, he gets elbowed off the sandbarge and falls into the Sarlacc Pit. I was like, 'Wait! The greatest character of all time just went out like that?' But it didn't diminish

“ Sometimes you just go ‘that character is cool! ’ ”

my love for Boba Fett and now 30 years later they're making a solo movie with him. He was a character that didn't live up to the idea of Boba Fett and yet he still endures, and I believe Deadpool through all of his variations has continued to endure because sometimes you just go 'that character is cool!'"

Although he left Marvel in 1992 to co-found Image Comics, Deadpool remains close to Liefeld's heart. And having worked closely with director Tim Miller and screenwriters Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick, he believes that the movie could be Deadpool's crowning achievement in any medium. "This movie will be the Deadpool that defines Deadpool," he says. "It's not by design but he's mostly been on these kind of wacky adventures, so there is no one great Deadpool storyline. He doesn't have a *Days Of Future Past*, a *Korvac Saga* or *Extinction Agenda*, so this film is going to be the definitive Deadpool experience, mark my words! It will be the one where people go 'This is the Deadpool I love the most!'" ●

The Deadpool movie is released on 10 February. Look out for more coverage next issue.



The X-Files logo, featuring a red circle with a white 'X' inside, set against a dark blue background. The letters 'FEDS' are written in a light blue serif font along the left edge of the circle.

As Mulder and Scully return to TV screens, Tara Bennett interrogates the stars to discover what awaits us



On the spectrum of impossible things, the chance of *The X-Files* returning to TV with original stars David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson seemed about as likely as Cigarette Smoking Man packing in the Morleys. Well, Chris

Carter's era-defining conspiracy saga is back this month as a six-episode event series, reuniting former FBI agents Mulder and Scully for new adventures chasing the truth behind secret government cabals, alien abductions and a whole mess of other zeitgeisty weirdness. SFX speaks exclusively with Anderson and Duchovny about returning to the series that changed their lives...

Did you want to have a say in where you imagined your character would be now?

GA I've never been collaborative about the direction of Scully. Other characters I have played, definitely, but not Scully. I don't know why. I don't know if it's that Chris [Carter] always had such a clear vision of how she was going to be into the future, or I never really had any interest or didn't see any room for it. It's one area that I've never really pitched aside from the episode that I wrote and directed ("All Things").

DD The characters are set after so many hundred episodes that we did. That's not going to change. Mulder now is not exactly who he was in the pilot so there has to be some kind of nod to the passage of time. I think Chris understood that and we could play that on the day we were shooting it too.

Did the possibility of directing an episode ever come up?

DD It was a matter of seeing what the season would look like. I assumed it would be 12 episodes and then it became 10, eight and then six. At that point it became clear to me that the only way I could write and direct an episode would be if we did at least 12 because it wouldn't be fair to make myself light in one out of six. At that point, I bowed out of writing or directing one but if we would do say 10, I would be happy to write or direct one.

It's been eight years since you last played these characters. Was that a good span of time to be away from them or did it make it harder to find them again?

DD I think the long time between doing it was good for me because I got to rediscover it



myself as we went along and not try to do the same things with the character. Just in terms of my comfort as an actor, going back to the pilot in 1993, it was our first jobs. Now we're much more comfortable in extending ourselves in different directions. I would say it took the first three or four years to start to know what we were doing as professional actors. Now, it's a different equation. It's a much more comfortable place to be in to try to do good work.

GA I think I pushed her so far away to make room for other characters that she was harder to find than I had expected. It didn't help that I was needing to wear a wig and it wasn't the right colour or shape at the beginning. Finding my way to her past all that was challenging. But we got there.

Was it surreal being back on set in Vancouver with a lot of the same cast and crew?

GA Yes, but the thing that feels different is the thing that is most obvious in that we're older [laughs]. We have different life concerns and different ways of looking at things. Doing this with grown up and varying ages of teenage children is a different experience from what it was at the beginning so all of that plays into it. It was different in that respect but great to see and have the opportunity to work with many of the same people. Many of the people who started on our show were in [Vancouver] working on the *Star Trek* feature so they've moved up and I got to visit a few of them. It was nice to see everybody and have that level of talent alive and well up there.

How was it working again with David after all this time?

GA It was different because we are older and more mature and more understanding of our



own process. Also the different pulls and tugs that are on us as human beings, outside of the fact we are actors, all of those things are helpful in maintaining a friendship and working relationship. I feel like we better served each other this time around than we did in the old days. It was fun and great to have him as a companion walking that same path as a friend. It was cool.

And Gillian?

DD What we have is actual history where we spent eight or nine years together working for many, many hours and the life-changing experience in terms of a show that gave us careers and profiles. We have a long-standing, deep appreciation and friendship for each other because there is nobody else on the planet that really understands exactly what we went through. If you have that, you don't really

Er, he doesn't look a day older.





Reunited: but how close are they to each other now?

“The cornerstone of the series is the nature of their relationship”

have to act. You just stand on your mark, look at the other person and allow it to be.

David, you left the original series before Gillian. Were the things that frustrated you back then still an issue this time?

DD No, the struggle I may have had once upon a time with the procedural aspect of the show, which can be very dry as an actor, I accept that now. At one point, that was all I was doing working on the show for 10 and sometimes 12 months a year. I know I wanted more as an actor than to crack the case. But as an actor, I've learned how to bring it in while we're

doing that and Gillian has too. Even if some scenes are dry or have exposition, we can bring life to them, I hope.

In season opener “My Struggle” we meet a Mulder wrestling with a new level of world-weariness. How did you get him there?

DD World-weariness gets a lot easier to play as you get old. It comes naturally [laughs]. Saying that, Mulder was always the one who drove the show with his belief and we start this iteration where he doesn't have that. It's tricky to start the car without the motor and then the motor has to pick up quickly.

Was the estrangement between Mulder and Scully something that made sense to you, given they were a lot closer the last time you played them?

GA It made sense to me the direction Chris was taking them. The cornerstone of the series is the nature of their relationship. It holds the dialogue together, it holds the motivations together and it holds the stories together so it made sense that Chris would re-establish us back in that dynamic again rather than where we had left off in the film where it was a much more intimate relationship. I wouldn't even



Men in hats are always conspiracy theorists.

know how to begin with that unless we ended up in a *Thin Man* situation, which could work too but it's not what we're about, so I got where he was headed.

What sort of stories should *The X-Files* be telling in the 21st century?

GA The subject matter in the first episode that continues into the next one is current and prescient and important. Conversations about privacy and security and drones and war are the topics. How our government deals with those topics has always been fodder for our writers and it will continue to be that way, I imagine, for some time given the way history is developing. It will be interesting to see the climate, especially in America, and what the temperature is to speak openly and be forthright about opinions.

DD I don't really know because I've never been a science fiction guy myself. It's really about the humanity of the world of the characters and that's what resonates with this show. I don't think the show ever tried to be in fashion and I think that's what makes it fashionable. Conspiracies will always be interesting drama and they have always been with us. The science of it has always been interesting to me and to Chris. He surrounds himself with people who have given him cool science to spark his imagination so there are different stories to tell. In the last movie, we had head replacement and Chris was sure this would be happening in a few years but he's obviously wrong. We jumped the gun a little on head replacement but that's the kind of thing you can do as science fiction becomes science. That's really the game Chris is playing – taking smart science fiction and saying, “This is science.”

Would you come back for more?

DD I don't know. I hate to disappoint but I take things as they come. Each day on the set had its own challenges and charms and problems. But when I sat down and watched it, I saw that the show still worked and the characters still worked. I have never not believed in the frame of the show as being so flexible as to be almost infinite. We have a show that can be comedy, drama, science fiction, mystery, thriller, horror and not feel like it's a different show. Doing six is maybe not enough to show that flexibility so maybe we have more to do. I don't know, we'll see. Having gone through it again, I think we're all okay with moving forward with more. I don't want to speak for everyone, but I would.

GA It's possible but not probable. It will be an ongoing conversation. We have to see how it does and if people are enthusiastic about it and have the same interest. I think it's all dependent on that. ☀

The X-Files returns to Fox in the US on 24 January, and will air on Channel 5 in the UK.

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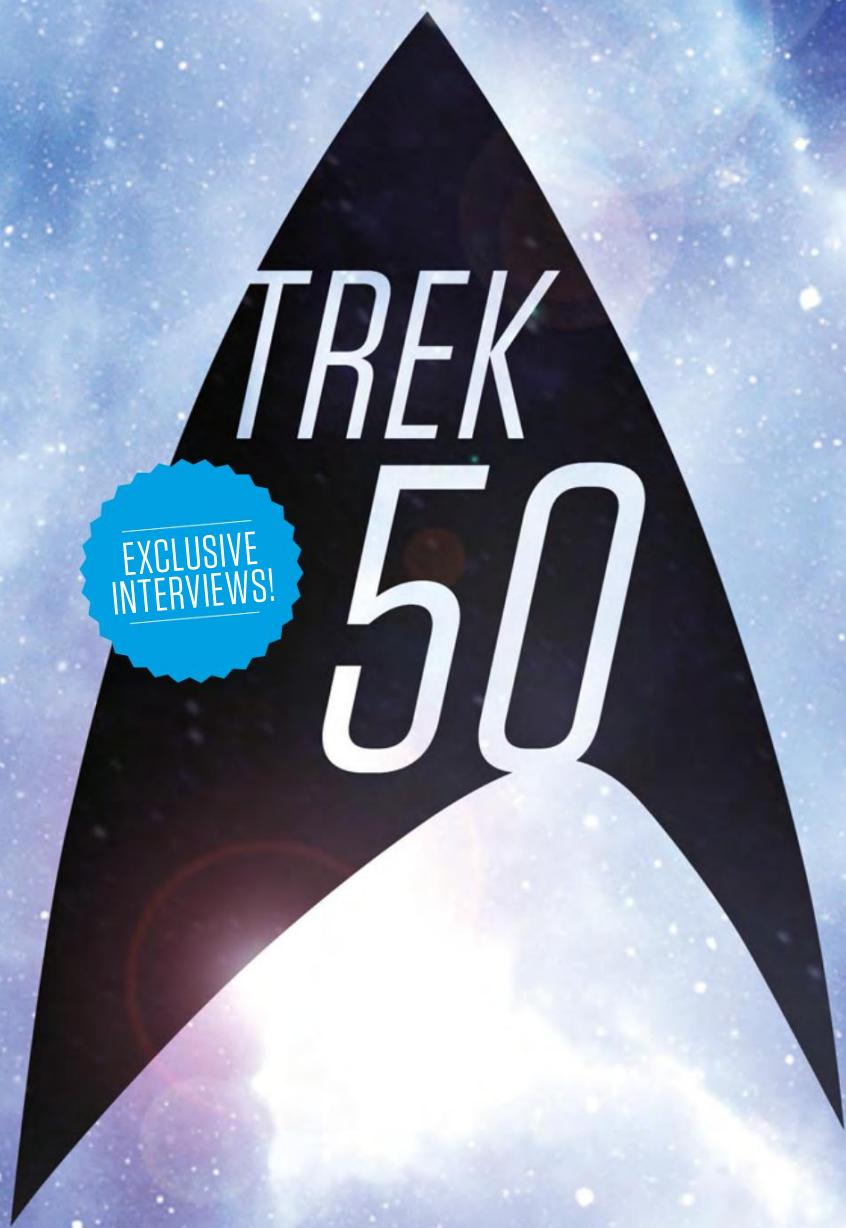
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THESE ARE
THE VOYAGES...



Celebrating half a century of *Star Trek*, SFX boldly goes into the past, present and future of the final frontier... Prepare to engage warp drive!

WILLIAM SHATNER, Trek's original hero reflects on fame, life after Leonard and half a century as an icon. "I'm not inured to the awesomeness of it," he tells Tara Bennett

O CAPTAIN! A OUR CAPTAIN!

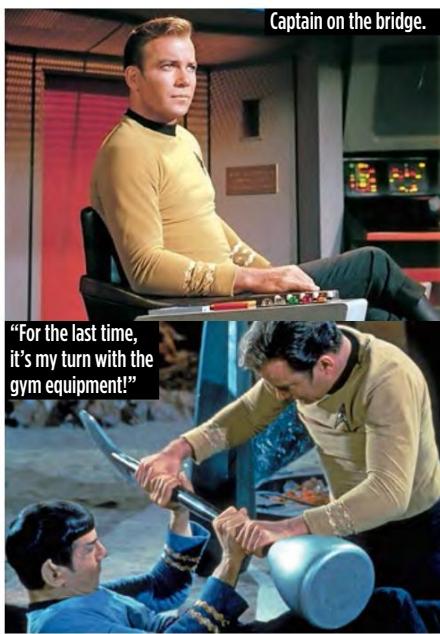
Mention *Star Trek* and chances are that despite 50 years of storytelling, with a deep roster of beloved characters spanning five live-action series and 12 (to date) movies, the character that immediately springs to mind is William Shatner's Captain James Tiberius Kirk.

Handsome and intense with a rakish charm, Kirk has always embodied the bravery and exploratory spirit at the heart of creator Gene Roddenberry's vision of the future. Sure, Kirk could be a skirt-chaser and more than a little impulsive, but there was a wisdom and gravitas to the character that endures. Plus, he cut an impressive silhouette, even in yellow velour.

In the half-century since *Star Trek* began William Shatner has headlined five television series, written original science fiction novels, made documentary films and penned and performed a one-man Broadway show. Yet he's forever Captain Kirk for a huge segment of the global population and he tells *SFX* that he doesn't mind one bit.

"It's unique and a showbiz phenomenon to be shown somewhere in the world, in a lot of places in the world, 50 years later," Shatner says of *Star Trek*'s singular staying power in the entertainment landscape. "Yes, it is amazing to me and I've never taken it for granted. I'm not inured to the awesomeness of it."

At the age of 84, Shatner's even leveraged his iconic status into an unexpected next phase of celebrity on social media, amassing a Twitter following of 2.2 million that he live-tweets genre TV shows to several nights a week. Coordinating with the cast and creators of shows like *Haven* or *Supernatural*, Shatner has been savvy in enlisting them and their fandoms to help him raise funds for charity causes. In turn, his frank and off-the-cuff



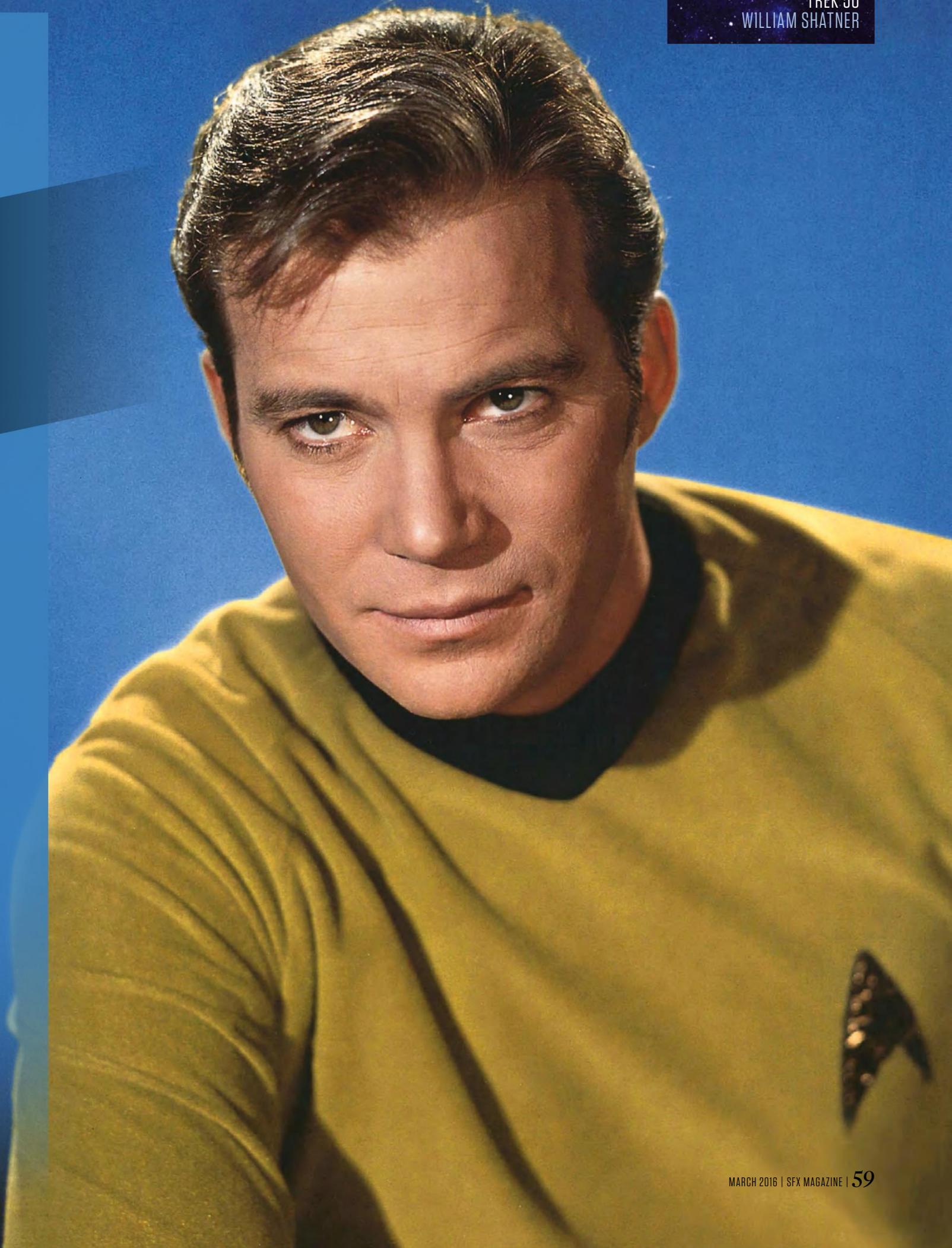
commentary has introduced the millennial generation to his charms.

But Shatner knows *Trek*, even in the cyber world, is often the entry point for his followers. "I think that a lot of them found me in *Star Trek* at one point or another, usually not at its first showing, because most of those people are dead," he chuckles. "But along the way they have found the *Star Trek* that I did, became interested in me and then followed me in different shows. Now it's more Shatner than Captain Kirk but there is still a great deal of interest in *Star Trek*. And because JJ Abrams has renewed the interest in the franchise, it's certainly continued."

CONTINUING MISSION

Speaking of Abrams' rebooted *Trek* films, since the first one in 2009 each instalment has swirled with rumours of a James Kirk appearance akin to the cameos done by Leonard Nimoy's Spock. But Shatner confirms that despite speculation Kirk will not be resurrected for *Star Trek Beyond*. "There was never a conversation," Shatner says of any meetings with the creative team. "It would have been interesting to see what their fertile imaginations could have done with somebody who is 20 years older than when Captain Kirk died [in *Star Trek: Generations*] and how they would have explained the difference in appearance. But that never came up. I'm sure they must have thought of it one time or another but I never had a substantial conversation about replaying the role."

In the meantime, Shatner has spent the last year ruminating on the loss of his friend, Leonard Nimoy, for his upcoming memoir with →





Someone didn't get the uniform memo that day.

David Fisher, *Leonard: My Fifty-Year Friendship With A Remarkable Man*. He's often written about Nimoy in his own autobiographies but Shatner says this book explores a different aspect of their half century connection.

"There have been a lot of autobiographies," Shatner explains, "and his son is doing a documentary about his life, but for me, the reason for doing the book was about friendship and the nature of friendship. My theory, thesis, if you will, is that men have trouble making friends, generally. If you make one friend, you have done something really great. Women seem to have more of a propensity to make multiple friends and men don't. Maybe it's a cultural thing. I try to discuss in some manner the nature of friendship and what Leonard's friendship meant to me because it was the only friend of that nature I ever had and that was the reason for writing the book."

MEMORY LANE

Shatner admits digging into his memory bank has been a bittersweet exercise. "The thing we don't think about in discussing the death of a friend is that with some memories you have of a delightful incident between the two of you, the memory of it begins to change as time goes by and you wonder specifically, 'What was it, and did it actually happen?' And you've lost the one party that could validate the memory and that's huge," he sighs.

However, Shatner says there's also been a fair amount of discovery that's been revelatory

for him regarding Nimoy's history. "In truth, I discovered a great deal about him that I didn't know, strangely," he shares. "Things that he did, things that interested him and some of his background. Who goes about looking into a friend's background, like where did they live, what did they live in? You don't do that ordinarily but when you write a book you delve into the background and suddenly things come up that you never knew."

In particular Shatner says he has a new appreciation for his friend's prowess with a camera. "In a way, a revelation was his interest in photography. As I was writing the book, I thought he just picked up the camera and found an interest and discovered he had a talent, which he did, a wonderful talent for photography. I didn't know he studied photography at an earlier age and

had a life-long ambition to be a photographer."

Outside of his writing, tweeting, convention appearances and performing his show *Shatner's World* in theatres around the globe, Shatner also spends a substantial portion of his calendar doing philanthropic work for charities and his own beloved Hollywood Charity Horse Show. Bringing that aspect of his life back to *Trek*, he's clearly grateful that fandom's generous spirit has allowed him to raise tremendous funds for children's charities Habitat for Humanity and the American Legion, among others.

"The public gives you celebrity by popularising you, and you can use that celebrity not only for your own good with your livelihood, but for other people's good as well," he reflects. "You can enlarge the value of that celebrity to bring good things to others."

Fine words to live long and prosper by.



GETTY (3), KOBAL (1)

"IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO TRY ONE OF THOSE, SHIRTS ON AGAIN..."

William Shatner takes five

Can you remember stepping on set for the first time?

► The most vivid memory I have of *Star Trek* is looking at the pilot they made with another actor. NBC didn't want to give the order for that pilot, but they wanted to do another pilot so they asked me to look at the pilot with the idea of playing the captain. I remember looking at the pilot thinking it was a terrific idea and agreed to play it. That was my first impression.

Is there a prop or costume you would have loved to have taken home?

► No, unfortunately I didn't. I was asked that question by someone who said they could get me a lot of money for a genuine prop [laughs]. It would be interesting to try one of those shirts on again and see if I could still fit into one.

Is there a line of dialogue that's stayed with you?

► No, I have the kind of memory that learns the words and after it's done, they're gone again. The day after it's all gone.

Kirk and Spock:
the original
bromance.



When was the last time you watched an episode?

► I have always stayed away from looking at myself. The longer I stay away it's like looking at a photograph from school. Look what I looked like back then!

What is *Star Trek's* greatest contribution to the world?

► Its contribution has been multiple and varied. Innumerable people have come up to me to say how it has affected their lives. I was shooting a documentary and I had to travel to quite a few places in the world but I couldn't do it because the airfare would have cost more than I had to spend on the whole doc. Bombardier Airplanes out of Canada lent me an airplane because the head of the company had become an aeronautical engineer because of *Star Trek*. And that's just one instance of astronauts, doctors, technical people, writers and scientists who have told me how their early years were influenced by the questions and some of the pretend answers that *Star Trek* brought up. ☺

Leonard: My Fifty-Year Friendship With A Remarkable Man is published 16 February.

THESE WEREN'T THE VOYAGES

Five *Treks* we never saw

HOPESHIP

► Calling Captain Kildare! Conceived by Gene Roddenberry and writer Darlene Hartman during *Star Trek's* second season, this spin-off would have followed a Starfleet hospital vessel, bringing a touch of '60s medical drama to the final frontier.

HARRY MUDD

► The popularity of Roger C Carmel's two appearances as cosmic wideboy Harry Mudd almost persuaded NBC to give him his own series - "A space pirate, intergalactic con man kind of thing," recalled Carmel. Shelved due to lack of development time.



SPOCK

► After cancelling *Star Trek* in 1969 Paramount asked Roddenberry for a Spock-centric spin-off set on Vulcan. Roddenberry said no, claiming Spock only worked surrounded by humans. But just imagine that Pon Farr ratings spike every seventh year...

PLANET OF THE TITANS

► *The Right Stuff's* Philip Kaufman was all set to direct *Star Trek's* first big-screen voyage, a Spock-focused tale of "sexuality and wonders" that hurled the crew through a black hole to Paleolithic times. Bond movie visionary Ken Adam redesigned the Enterprise.

STAR TREK: PHASE II

► A second five year mission almost warped to television in 1978 with scripts written and sets built. Nimoy bailed, replaced by a young Vulcan lieutenant named Xon. Pilot script "In Thy Image" was upgraded to *The Motion Picture* in the wake of *Star Wars*. Nick Setchfield

TREK 50
JONATHAN FRAKES



STILL NUMBER ONE

The Next Generation rebuilt Roddenberry's dream for the '80s and beyond.

JONATHAN FRAKES



tells Tara Bennett about his Enterprising past and future

Jonathan Frakes has served the *Star Trek* franchise for 28 of its 50 years, playing Commander William T Riker on four different series and directing no less than 24 episodes as well as big-screen entries *Star Trek: First Contact* and *Star Trek: Insurrection*. Despite his busy schedule as a TV director, Frakes tells *SFX* that the 24th century is never far from his life and heart.

You've been part of the *Star Trek* franchise for half its existence. Is that strange to process?

► The longevity blows my mind. I was naive to how much of a cultural icon *Star Trek* was in the world. I wasn't a Trekkie when I started on this project. I was blessed to join this family now celebrating its 50th anniversary.

What did your cast get right and maybe not quite land?

► Riker and Picard had a relationship which was its own friendship that was father/son, big brother/little brother, cerebral and physical that took its time for the writers to find and for Patrick [Stewart] and I to embrace. What we missed – that Patrick and Brent [Spiner] and I fought and searched and tried to find a way to reinvent – was that incredible triangle that Bones, Kirk and Spock had. It was one of the greatest elements on classic *Trek*. We tried and never really reached it because our characters didn't lend themselves to that as much. But in trying for it, we found moments that we

probably would not have found if we weren't as inspired by that other fabulous triangle.

Looking back now what's your assessment of the *Next Gen* films?

► I think each film was its own animal. *Generations* we started a week after we finished the last episode of the series so it was just thrilling to be part of the movie franchise. *First Contact* is arguably one of the best of the *Star Trek* movies ever made and that's because the script from Brannon [Braga] and Ron [Moore] was brilliant. *Insurrection* was an entirely different animal. Then we got buried in *Nemesis*. My theory is that was because it wasn't about the heroes but about introducing the wonderful Tom Hardy character.

How do you feel about the Abrams era of films?

► I'm a huge fan of JJ. I wish I had the budget he had, frankly. I think the cast is spectacular. Pine is perfect as Kirk but my personal favourite is Karl Urban in the role of Bones.



I lobbied very hard when the director fell out [of *Star Trek Beyond*] but I think Justin Lin is going to do a great job. I'm looking forward to that. But it was painful to not have participation at all in *Star Trek*. I was on the set of both films so I visited their bridge but it was verboten for anyone from our *Trek* to work on them. I know some of my cast mates aren't as thrilled about the way JJ has done things, but I'm a big fan.

Can you remember stepping on set for the first time?

► I do and I remember thinking, "This looks bigger on TV." [laughs]

Klingons or Vulcans? And why?

► First of all, I served with the Klingons. I slept with their women. Now if you were to ask Klingons or Romulans, I might give you a different answer but I am very pro-Klingon. Worf is a friend.

Is there a prop or costume you would have loved to have taken home?

► I took a couple of costumes and a couple of phasers, I won't lie to you.

What is *Star Trek*'s greatest contribution to the world?

► When I'm at the conventions I hear stories of people who say they were raised in an abusive family. They tell me "The only time my father and I were able to sit in a room together was watching *TNG*". It's heartbreaking. But vets have come back with legs missing saying they got through it because they watched season whatever over and over again and it took some of their pain away. It's a great thing to receive. The conventions are a blast but when you hear people comfortable enough to tell revealing, honest, painful, raw stories about how the show has affected them, that is the takeaway. ●



HOLO VICTORY



Star Trek: Voyager's
ROBERT PICARDO
tells Bryan Cairns about his
days in the Delta Quadrant.
Please state the nature of the
interview opportunity...

Robert Picardo's place in *Star Trek* history is assured. His turn as the Doctor – alias Emergency Medical Hologram Mark 1 – in *Star Trek: Voyager* made him a fan favourite. He went on to reprise the role in *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* and on the big screen in *Star Trek: First Contact*. Now he's sharing his memories of the final frontier...

Can you remember stepping on set for the first time?

► I remember stepping foot on the sets and thinking how cool the sets looked and how they had a tremendous reality to them. You make all the jokes about the rickety sci-fi sets, where the door closes and the walls shake. But *Voyager* was built like a tank. That was impressive.

Is there a prop or costume you would have loved to have taken home?

► It would have been great to have an authentic Tricorder. There were so many of my medical "blinkies" that were fun. "Blinkies" was the careful scientific term. The producers did let me have the Doctor's smoking jacket from the episode where he's writing a book called "Author, Author".

Is there a line of dialogue that stayed with you?

► I remember the first time I had huge dialogue requirements, since the way the character spoke and the way he spewed

technology was pretty breathless. I think it was where Neelix loses his lungs. They were beamed out of his body by the Vidiians, who are this scavenger race that steals organs. I have to create holographic lungs until we can recover Neelix's own lungs. That was a very technical episode. I do remember in the scene where I am explaining myself, when Tom Paris goes to strike me and his arm wobbles through my image, I say, "The magnetic containment field that creates the illusion of my body can be modified to allow matter to pass through it or be stopped," or something like that. I remember that line.

When was the last time you actually watched an episode?

► Once in a while, especially if it's dubbed in another language, I'll leave an episode on. The last full episode I remember watching was one of my favourites to shoot, "Tinker, Tenor, Doctor, Spy", which is the Doctor's daydreaming episode. It's some of the broadest comedy we did.



Lost in space.

Klingons or Vulcans? Which do you prefer?

► I'd have to say Vulcans. I am not only a Vulcan fan, but think Tim Russ is the unsung hero of our show. His performance as Tuvok was terrific and full of dignity.

What has been *Star Trek's* greatest contribution to the world?

► Its positivism. It's the fact that *Star Trek* posits a vision of the future where man survives, where he cooperates with other men and by extension, other beings and races. It's where technology elevates man and does not destroy him. It's that it's possible for humanity – that is capable of so much violence, destruction and homicide – can really rise to its best self. In fact, I think the subliminal message of *Star Trek* is that we have to rise to our best selves in order to survive.

Do you think we will ever reach the future we see in *Star Trek*?

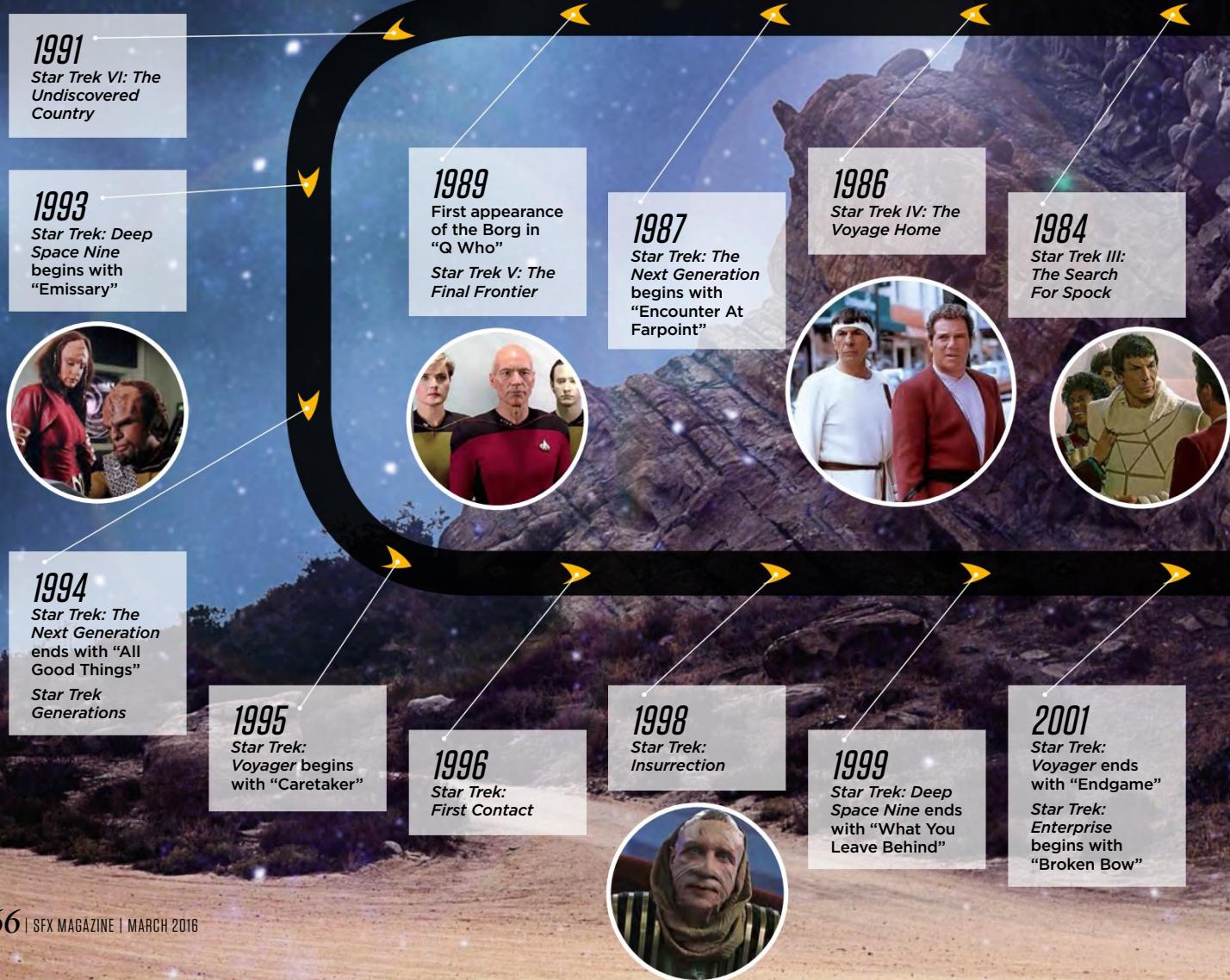
► Yes, I do. We're at a real exciting moment in real science as well as science fiction. The real proof of water on Mars, as well as the success of Andy Weir's novel *The Martian* and the movie adaptation, has really given a jolt of interest and enthusiasm in space travel.

Which bit of *Trek* tech would improve your life?

► The answer everyone wants to give is the Holodeck. There are so many applications for it, both ones that are PG-13 and ones that aren't. But, I would have to say having played the Doctor, it would be the medical Tricorder. The idea of a non-invasive medical scanner that can diagnose just by being waved over an organism is an exciting breakthrough in medicine. ☀

Stand by for slingshot! Take a voyage through five thrilling decades of the final frontier... THE 50 YEAR MISSION*

* Okay, it's actually 52 years - but 50 years since *Star Trek* debuted on TV. A most logical temporal anomaly.





1964

Pilot episode "The Cage" is filmed. Leonard Nimoy plays Spock for the first time

1965

"The Cage" is rejected by the NBC network



1966

William Shatner plays Kirk in second pilot "Where No Man Has Gone Before". *Star Trek* debuts on TV with "The Man Trap"

1967

First appearance of the Klingons in "Errand Of Mercy"

First appearance of Khan in "Space Seed"

First trip to planet Vulcan in "Amok Time"

1969

The original series ends with "Turnabout Intruder"

1972

The very first *Star Trek* convention is held in New York in January



1982

Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan



1979

Star Trek: The Motion Picture brings the Enterprise to the big screen

1974

Star Trek: The Animated Series ends with "The Counter-Clock Incident"



1973

Star Trek: The Animated Series begins with "Beyond The Farthest Star"



2002

Star Trek: Nemesis



2005

Star Trek: Enterprise ends with "These Are The Voyages..."

2009

Star Trek reboots the franchise and creates a new timeline

2013

Star Trek Into Darkness marks Leonard Nimoy's final performance as Spock



2016

Star Trek Beyond due to be released

From The Next Generation to Enterprise, **BRANNON BRAGA** fought to keep the Trek dream alive on TV. "We did so many they couldn't all be winners," he tells Tara Bennett

TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

Writer and producer Brannon Braga can chart his professional career alongside the evolution of the *Star Trek* franchise. From an intern on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* to co-writing two *Trek* films and then co-creating *Star Trek: Enterprise*, Braga was a protector of the Roddenberry flame for 15 years and navigated the highs and lows of that experience. Talking to SFX he reflects on *Trek*, then and now...

Did you have any sense that *Star Trek* would dominate so much of your career as a writer?

► If anyone would have told me on the first day of my eight-week internship that 15 years later I would be the last guy there, turning the lights off, I would not have believed them. By the time I realised I was going to be actually running a show, it was about eight years. It was like I went to college and grad school and residency.

What was it about the *Trek* mythology that appealed to you creatively?

► It's such a brilliant premise because you can do any kind of story you want or any kind of allegory you want. I viewed it almost like an anthology series in a way. I gravitated toward its underlying philosophy of acceptance and diversity and a world where humanity got its

shit together. Some writers didn't like that because they thought you couldn't get conflict. I'm like, "Then go work on a different show because this is Roddenberry's vision." In my episodes, particularly early on, I gravitated towards the weird. My episodes often resembled *Twilight Zone* episodes, which would change and evolve as I matured.

How did it feel to inherit Gene Roddenberry's legacy?

► The hardest part of inheriting that mantle was the criticism that I ruined the franchise because it ended under my watch and I was personally responsible. I take responsibility for any of the bad episodes. We did so many they couldn't all be winners. I am very proud of my work on *Star Trek*. People forget I was also there for its heyday. But that's forgotten. It's just "*Enterprise* sucks!" In my opinion, all TV shows come to an end. I was upset the network took the show off the air. It ran for



four years but they didn't get *Star Trek* and they didn't like *Star Trek*.

Do you think *TNG* could ever get another shot at a movie franchise?

► It's very difficult for me to imagine. I would love it but unfortunately the last two *TNG* movies were disappointments. I don't think they worked creatively, in my humble opinion. One of my biggest career regrets was that I couldn't do the next *Star Trek* movie after *First Contact*. I was offered it but I was taking over *Voyager* at the time and I didn't feel I could do both. I wish I had. So I'm not sure there is an appetite for *Next Gen* things. Or they should do it on Netflix.

What do you think of the Abrams' films?

► I thought *Star Trek* was fantastic. It was beautifully directed and took *Trek* to a whole other level in terms of action. They had quadruple the budget when we did ours. But the casting was perfect and it was almost an impossible task. *Into Darkness* was slightly less successful in that I was pining for the allegory. It was feeling like a *Star Trek* flavoured action movie.

How can *Trek* thrive for 50 more years?

► *Star Trek* in my mind is a TV show. Each generation has their *Star Trek* and I see this anecdotally over and over again. Hopefully with the new series they can get back to more meditative storytelling. It's all about making sure the next television show is really good and finds a new generation of viewers to keep it going. It's been ten years but it's still very popular and could be without another show, but I believe it's all about TV. ●





2009's Star Trek rebooted the final frontier for the big screen. Bad Robot's **BRYAN BURK** tells Tara Bennett how the past powered the future

BOLDLY GOING BACK

As co-founder of Bad Robot Productions with JJ Abrams, Bryan Burk helped to creatively shepherd an array of hits from *Alias* and *Lost* to *Cloverfield* and the rebooted *Star Trek* movie franchise. The series was never on his childhood radar, Burk admits, but he tells *SFX* that the last seven years have been all about discovering his inner Trekkie...

Why did you return to the classic crew for the recent movies?

► I can tell you from our initial conversation with Bob [Orci], Alex [Kurtzman], Damon [Lindelof], JJ and I, the first sentence out of everyone's mouth was, "We're going to blow up Vulcan so everyone knows we're not f-ing around." However, Leonard [Nimoy] or Bill [Shatner], or both, are going to be in the film because Gene is no longer with us and they are the carriers of the flame. If we are going to try and go forward with this franchise, we have to do it with one or both of their blessings to be able to make it.

What are you most proud of about the first two films?

► In general with *Star Trek*, a lot of people came out saying they really liked it and it wasn't what they thought it was going to be. For me, that was the biggest win. More than anything else, what I liked about the second film, and it sounds crass, but our box office doubled internationally which was really

telling because people were starting to see [*Trek*] and not be afraid of it in the rest of the world. My goal for the *Star Trek* franchise is to make it something that when a film comes out in all these countries that were not traditionally *Star Trek* fans, they are now starting to become *Trek* fans.

The reason we even got involved was that it was the first time I could remember at any time in my life that there wasn't a *Star Trek* project happening. Nothing was going on. We didn't want to do another one for the sake of it, but to take all of that history and put it back in the world for people to discover yet do it differently.



Recasting the most iconic friendship in SF.



"Look, I'm not saying it goes well for the people on Vulcan."

Star Trek Into Darkness was polarising because of its use of Khan as a villain. Why did you go for such an iconic foe?

► The original logic of making Khan the villain is the same reason why when they did Superman they used Lex Luthor, or with Batman, it's the Joker or the Riddler. There are only a handful of villains who are legendary in the canon. Obviously we could have picked another one or made them up, but it seemed like an exciting thing to bring in the biggest, most nefarious villain.

What's director Justin Lin bringing to Star Trek Beyond?

► I'm a big fan of Justin Lin's work. No one directs action like Justin, but on top of that, he's a big *Star Trek* fan. It's about "Where does he take these characters and what's his take going to be?" In the beginning, you could see a palpable excitement as the cast started to work with him. I think the scope that Justin brings to this movie is enormous. It's a *Star Trek* that will exceed everyone's expectations and that's all we can hope for.

What does Star Trek need to do to survive another 50 years?

► It's still following the guidelines set up by Gene Roddenberry and sticking to the idea of a future where our problems aren't amongst us, and it's out there and we're working together. It's more than just firing phasers at each other. I believe the next 50 years could be better than the last, and I'm counting on it and hoping for it. Somewhere there's a little boy or girl reading this and they will be inspired to take the torch and continue where we briefly have our hands on it. What are people going to do next with it? ♦

THE NEXT FRONTIER... Nick Setchfield beams up everything we know about Trek's 50th anniversary blockbuster

AT THE GREAT BEYOND

The man engaging thrusters on the 50th anniversary *Star Trek* adventure is Justin Lin, best known for helming the billion dollar, car-shredding mayhem of the *Fast & Furious* franchise. "Invariably there's going to be a different vibe when you remove someone as gregarious and outgoing and talented as JJ [Abrams]," says star Zachary Quinto. "But Justin has come in with this really interesting and confident energy that's a little bit more reserved and a little bit quieter, but also very powerful and really sure-handed."

While JJ Abrams freely confessed his heart belonged to the Force, Lin is a lifelong Trekkie. "All my friends were *Star Wars* kids but I didn't go to the movies so I was the *Star Trek* kid." Accepting the director's chair was, he says, "a very personal and emotional decision."

Simon Pegg earned a promotion from the engine room to pen the screenplay with writer Doug Jung, whose credits include TV shows *Banshee* and *Dark Blue*. The pair were drafted for screenwriting duties after Paramount rejected a previous screenplay co-written by Roberto Orci, originally signed to direct. "I think the studio were worried that it might have been a little too *Star Trek-y*," says Pegg.

Paramount is chasing a more accessible, mainstream-friendly take, one that can potentially emulate Marvel-style box office. "People don't see it being a fun, brightly coloured, Saturday night entertainment like *The Avengers*," says Pegg, who promises "optimism and fun", a tonal shift after the frequently grim-tinged *Into Darkness*.



An older, wiser Kirk? Probably not.



Everyone was getting excited for the Galactic Trampolining Finals.



He cannae change the laws of physics – but he can write the script.



"Damn it, Jim!"



New life, new civilisations, and new alien species, it seems.



Looking snug in a stylish new uniform.

A Pegg may have bona fide geek credentials but don't expect too many Trekkie-tickling callbacks. "I have to abide by certain rules and do right by the original series, and not be too postmodern with it and not be too aware of itself," he tells *Collider*. "I have to try and take on the spirit of the show, rather than fill it with stuff that people will just go, 'Oh yeah, that's from episode something or other.' It's more than that."

As its title implies, *Star Trek Beyond* returns to Gene Roddenberry's original five-year mission statement, emphasising the final frontier spirit of the classic series. While the last two films struggled to escape the gravitational pull of planet Earth, this one promises to truly chart strange new worlds, seeking out new life and new civilisations. "It's all new and fresh," says Lin. "The Klingons, Romulans and other species are great but it's time to go further. It has been fun to focus on creating whole new worlds and species."



"But I just spent three years learning Klingon!"

A It's been a transwarp scramble to get this instalment of *Trek* cinema to the screen in time. Pegg and Jung started work on their replacement screenplay only six months before filming was set to begin, when the movie was already close to a stage of pre-production that demanded finalised design work and locked-down setpieces. "Making a movie of this size with the time that was available to us is kinda insane but you can either fight it or just embrace it," says Lin of the last minute preparation needed. "I come from the indie world and I feel like we're making the biggest budget indie film of all time."

Still brings a tear to our eyes...

A The Spock/Bones banter quota will increase. Zachary Quinto reveals that he shares the majority of his screentime with Karl Urban's Doctor McCoy. "Those characters are so diametrically opposed that it'll be nice to see them interacting," he tells *The Telegraph*. What are the odds on a "goddamned green-blooded hobgoblin" or two?

A Quinto is mindful of the fact that this is his first time playing Spock since the passing of Leonard Nimoy. "For me there is another undercurrent in this film which is to truly honour my dear friend and carry on the legacy that he worked so hard to create." →



A Joining the returning cast is Idris Elba – not playing a Klingon, despite rumours that the *Luther* main man was all set to rock a bat’leth. “I think *Star Trek* has prided themselves on being quite classic when it comes to villains,” he tells MTV, “like ‘he’s a guy who wants to end the world.’... But in this version of the film there’s a slightly different twist to that. It’s quite an interesting journey, which I think is groundbreaking for the franchise. But it still keeps with the ‘classic bad guy is a classic bad guy’ tone.” The new trailer hints that Elba will be buried beneath blue prosthetics in the movie.

A Also onboard is Sofia Boutella, best known for her scene-stealing turn as the lethal, blade-footed assassin in *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. She’s playing a chalk-white alien from a race we’ve never encountered before. She’s joined by actor and martial artist Joe Taslim, who worked with Justin Lin on *Fast & Furious 6*.

A Principal photography kicked off on 25 June in Vancouver. The crew filmed exteriors among the trees and boulders of Squamish, a popular outdoor adventure destination just outside the city – shades of Kirk’s rock-climbing antics in *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* – before moving to the Pitt River Quarries.

A In October the production decamped to Dubai for an intensive 13-day shoot that made use of the Middle East metropolis’s unearthly hi-tech skyline. Dubai looks like “whatever tomorrow would be,” enthuses Chris Pine. “We came looking for the future and we found it,” agrees producer Jeffrey Chernov, who dangled Tom Cruise from the city’s tallest tower in *Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol*.



Natural skin markings, or just some dodgy tattoos she woke up with after a heavy night out?

A The Dubai shoot involved the crashed hull of a Constitution Class starship. Could the Enterprise be in line for another almighty insurance claim? She’s certainly suffering some serious damage in the trailer... Serious enough for the crew to eject in escape pods by the look of it. Is the franchise’s flagship set to replay the same fate that befell her in the original third *Trek* movie, *The Search For Spock*?

A One set picture revealed a memorial plaque for the crew of sister starship the USS Yorktown, seen in classic series episode “Obsession” and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. It was also Roddenberry’s original choice of name for the Enterprise.

A Starfleet’s tweaked its wardrobe for this adventure. Gone is the fish-scale effect on the crew tunics – actually hundreds of tiny Starfleet insignia – replaced by a smoother fabric closer to the one used in the ’60s show. The new tops come with a high-collared black undershirt, recalling Spock’s look in *Star Trek*:

The Motion Picture, and there are darker panels of fabric either side of the chest. Female officers now have long sleeves, finally allowing their rank to be displayed.

A **Kirk and Chekov have also been** glimpsed in dashing new togs, wearing ribbed jackets that look like streamlined versions of the Excursion gear from *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan*. Low-slung, thigh-strapped phaser holsters add a touch of swashbuckling Han Solo cool.

A Michael Giacchino returns to score his third consecutive *Star Trek* movie.

A **Star Trek Beyond** will be released 22 July 2016, two months before the franchise’s official golden anniversary on 8 September, 50 years since “The Man Trap” first took viewers to the final frontier. It’s up against Guy Ritchie’s *King Arthur* and *Ice Age: Collision Course* and positioned in the week between the *Ghostbusters* reboot and Matt Damon’s return to Bourne. Set box office to stun! ●

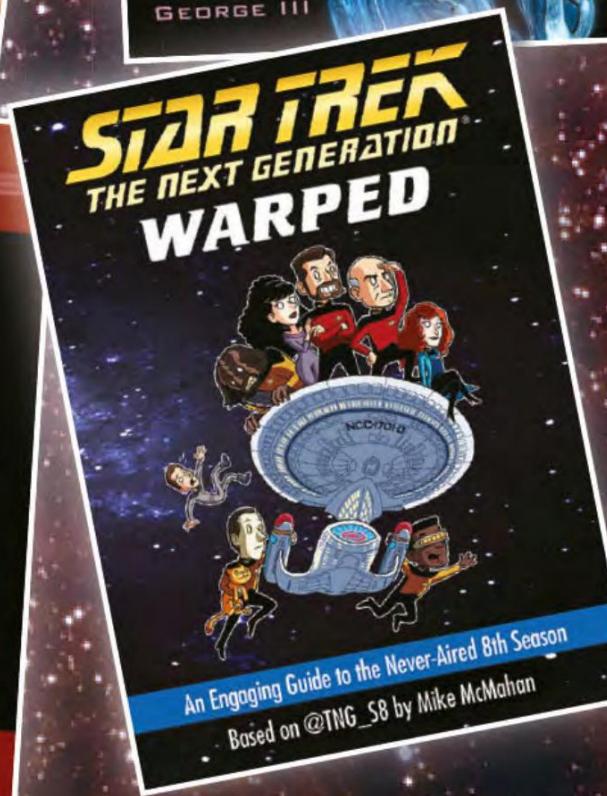
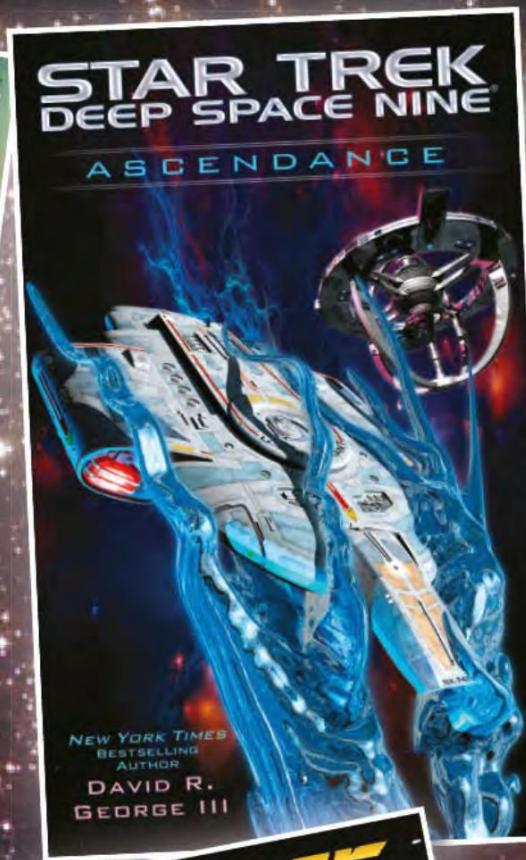
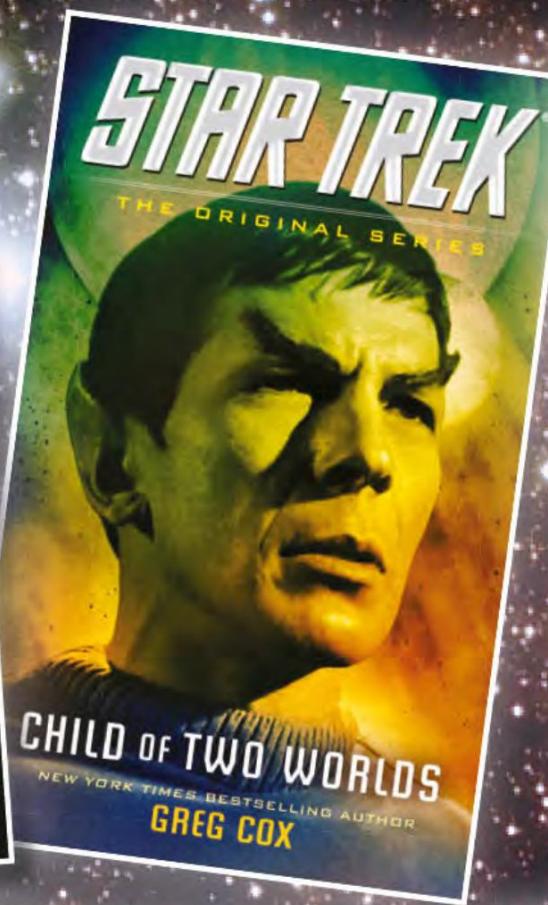
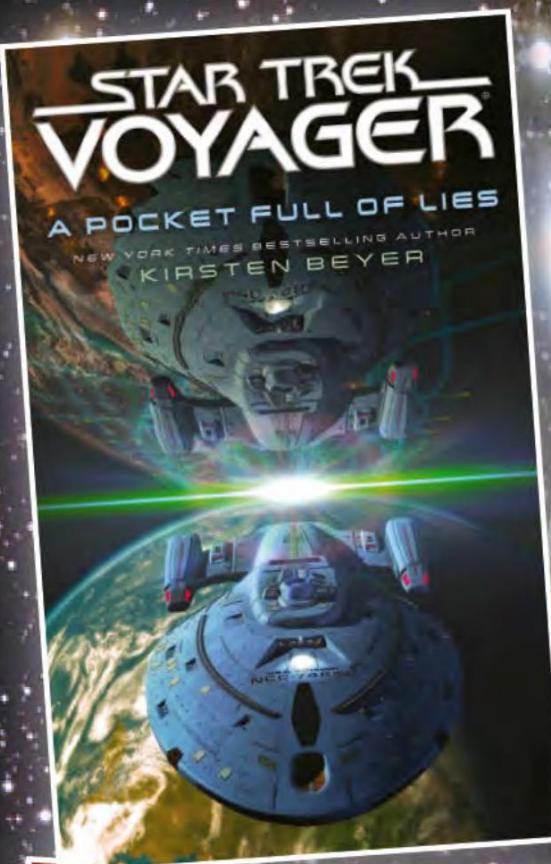
He’s never having a good time, is he?



How much trouble does the helmsman get in if the ship crashes?

“Who’re you looking at?”

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Couch Potato
JOIN TEAM SFX ON THE SOFA OF SNARK

KLINGONS

In honour
of *Trek's* 50th, we
sit down for an
evening with
Kronos's finest

→ Team portrait by Olly Curtis

There's Klingons on the starboard bow – and they've been there for nearly half a century. Since making their debut in season one of the original *Star Trek*, the war-loving residents of Kronos have popped up in every incarnation of the franchise, from the movies to prequel series *Enterprise*. They've been through some pretty major changes along the way – sometimes enemies, sometimes friends, sometimes not looking like Klingons at all. So, in honour of *Star Trek's* most enduring alien race – sorry, Borg chums – the SFX team heads to Rich's living room to raise several flagons of blood wine to 50 years of Klingon history. Q'plar! →

GETTY (1)

17:00



We are a proud warrior race.



Spock in a smock!

STAR TREK "ERRAND OF MERCY" 1967

Nur first away mission takes us back to the original Enterprise's first encounter with the Klingons, as Kirk and Spock beam down to the primitive, peaceful planet of Organia – a planet populated by men in smocks and green coats – to prevent the Klingons from establishing a military presence.

NICK The locals look like they've wandered in from a nativity.

JORDAN In those Starfleet uniforms, Kirk and Spock aren't doing a great job of blending in, are they?

RICH They never gave a shit about the prime directive in those days.

NICK You can tell because Spock's not wearing the prime directive beanie.

Kirk and Spock dress in Organian togs, and bag themselves an audience with the planet's elders – seemingly led by Jeremy Corbyn. It's not long before the Klingons turn up. Except, they're not the pasty-headed Klingons we've come to know and, er, love...

JORDAN Some of them haven't even got beards!

RICH That's John Colicos as Kor – he was Baltar in the original *Battlestar Galactica*.

NICK With a bit of Fu Manchu.

RICH Pretty much the only thing from these Klingons that survived into *TNG* is the sparkly sash.

IAN It should say Miss Dorset on it or something.

NICK He's great, this guy. He's got charisma. He doesn't need any of that, "You are betraying my honour!" bullshit.

JORDAN Can I just say that Kirk is rocking the smock.

IAN Not as much as Spock in the smock.

An explosion takes place on the planet's surface.

IAN Stock footage, Spock footage and smock footage all blending into one!

RICH Has Kor just asked his men to take Kirk to his office?

NICK How has he got an office? It's the least Klingon word ever.

IAN I blame the universal translator. He probably said blood box.

Kor tells the Enterprise boys that his toy could turn them into a "mental vegetable".

IAN "Mental vegetable" sounds like the name of a rave band.

Corbyn and co tell Kirk, Spock and the Klingons that they're actually superintelligent non-corporeal beings, and that they will not allow the two sides to fight on their watch.

IAN It's a bit of a dramatic cop out when you have aliens with psychic powers to stop people fighting.

NICK Maybe Jeremy Corbyn does have these powers. Imagine if he got up and pulled this in PMQs.

IAN I actually think Kirk's learned a valuable lesson today.

JORDAN We all have.



Space Corbyn and the Labour frontbench.

17:50



Tragedy! When you lose control...



"You get paid how much?"

STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE "AFFLICION"/"DIVERGENCE" 2005

It's a shameless bit of retconning, as the prequel series goes back to explain why Kor and the other original series Klingons didn't have lumpy foreheads. But first of all, let's get the obligatory conversation about the theme tune out of the way. Altogether now: "It's been a long road..."

RICH At least it's the later version with added strumming.

NICK It's still the least *Star Trek* thing ever.

RICH Great visuals, though.

IAN This is the producers trying to get away from everything *Star Trek* was.

NICK It's horrific.

As chief engineer Trip Tucker prepares to transfer to Enterprise's sister ship Columbia, Dr Phlox and Ensign Hoshi are enjoying some shore leave when Phlox is kidnapped.

IAN This is very welcome news.

NICK He's like some kind of nobbly Frasier.

RICH At least he's better than Neelix...

Cut to Phlox's destination, a Klingon research station where a genetically modified virus is killing Klingons – and making them look strangely human...



Learning to handle his "disfigurement".

NICK Is there any dentistry on Kronos?

IAN They carve their teeth that way.

JORDAN Then how does the disease fix their teeth? That must be some virus.

IAN The new model Klingon is very Bee-Gee-ish.

RICH It'll be a tragedy. They're just trying to stay alive, etc.

NICK I hate the hairy Klingons. They look stinky and horrible. I like my Klingons suave and sinister.

IAN They're like elderly bikers.

RICH Though this one guy is interested in science. Do you think he was picked on at Klingon school? **It turns out an experiment to create superhuman (or should that be "superKlingon")? augments has backfired, creating the lethal virus.**

The first half of the two-parter blends uneventfully into the second via the least cliffhanger cliffhanger ever...

RICH Look! That's Seth MacFarlane off of *Family Guy* in engineering. He's turned up just to alleviate the boredom.

NICK It does feel like there's only one episode of story across the two-parter.

IAN The show had a budget cut, so suddenly there's lots of two episode stories.

RICH It's phenomenally tedious.

JORDAN It's a good looking show, though. Well lit, well shot. **Captain Archer shows up to donate his blood to help make a cure.**

NICK At least their hair looks better now. They've got some conditioner in it.

19:30



Showing off the branded crockery.



Come Dine With Me, Federation style.

21:40



The Bird of Prey: still a design classic.



Klingons on the... thingy, you know.

STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY 1991

It's the original *Trek* crew's final voyage on the big screen, one of the great even-numbered *Treks* and a tale loaded with political allegory...

The USS Excelsior, captained by one Hikaru Sulu, is out cataloguing gaseous anomalies.

IAN Gaseous anomalies. That's what I joined Starfleet for.

NICK I always thought the *Excelsior* was a spectacularly ugly looking ship.

JORDAN I love that Sulu has his own *Excelsior*-branded teacup. They probably have a gift shop where they sell pencil sharpeners.

RICH And now it's time for one of the most influential visual effects of all time.

The Klingon moon of Praxis explodes, firing out a shockwave that would later become familiar to viewers of the *Star Wars* Special Editions. One bridge officer admits he "cannot confirm the existence of Praxis".

IAN There's an existential crisis right there.

JORDAN "I am the ship's existential officer, Ensign Sartre." Months later, Federation bigwigs and the Enterprise crew are briefed about the Klingon crisis.

IAN So this is two months on and none of them knew about this?

NICK Don't they have Twitter? Kirk and crew throw around un-PC remarks about Klingons that "can't be trusted".

RICH How can you trust a Klingon? They're not even consistent about their foreheads. The Enterprise plays host to Klingon High Chancellor

Gorkon and his entourage – including the Shakespeare-spouting General Chang.

JORDAN Gorkon's meant to be Gorbachev, right?

RICH Yeah, it feels kind of unsubtle now, but it was clever at the time with Chernobyl.

After Chancellor Gorkon is assassinated, Kirk and McCoy take the blame and do time on the barren Klingon prison planet Rura Pehthe. They're eventually rescued by Spock and co, and back on the Enterprise bridge just in time to face off against General Chang on a prototype Bird of Prey that can FIRE WHEN CLOAKED!

Chang taunts Kirk by quoting Shakespeare at him – in English rather than the original Klingon.

RICH Do you think other Klingons avoid Chang at parties because he's known as a Shakespeare bore?

NICK Somebody has actually put on *Hamlet* in Klingon.

With Chang's ship destroyed, the entire Enterprise crew beam down for a team outing at the Khitomer peace conference – conveniently saving the Federation President from another assassination attempt.

NICK It's just on the verge of *Dad's Army*, isn't it?



Who d'you think you are kidding, Mr Klingon?

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION "SINS OF THE FATHER" 1990

Our Klingon mission ends in season three of *TNG*, as Klingon commander Kurn arrives on the Enterprise as part of an exchange programme.

NICK They weren't good at their pre-titles on *TNG* were they. It's not like Apollo's hand, or "They're all dressed as Nazis!" This is a man. Arriving on a ship.

RICH At least Kurn looks cool next to Worf, though. That early *TNG* bob haircut was a tricky thing to pull off – and Worf didn't manage it.

Wesley Crusher moans that Kurn doesn't like him very much.

RICH You must be used to that, Wesley.

NICK It's like human resources is what powers this show. My theory is that classic *Trek* is about exploration, this is about going to work.

Picard and his crew treat Kurn to a slap-up meal. Sadly, most of the food is already dead.

NICK A Klingon holding salad? Does that happen? Do you get vegetarians on Kronos?

JORDAN Just pescatarians.

NICK This is very different to the suave guys from the '60s. They'd have loved this dinner party.



"I've got some gossip on Mr Worf..."

RICH They wouldn't have had a problem with crockery and cutlery. **Kurn complains that the food is much too bland for the stomach of a Klingon.**

NICK "But I like my Caesar salad," says Worf.

Kurn reveals that he's actually Worf's younger brother, and that Worf must take responsibility for, er, the sins of their father who stands accused of collaborating with Romulans.

RICH The *EastEnders* theme kicks in...

IAN Surely this bit should have been in the teaser.

JORDAN Why didn't he come in and say this straight away? It's such an artificial construct.

Picard redirects AN ENTIRE STARSHIP to the Klingon homeworld to sort Worf's predicament.

RICH Is this our first ever trip to Kronos?

IAN It might be.

NICK This courtroom stuff sums up why I hate modern Klingons. They just shout at each other in overblown language. How many times does the word "honour" come up in an episode?

IAN Honor Blackman would be revered as a deity.

NICK All subtlety goes out the window when you've got Klingons.

IAN And also people.

NICK Suddenly it feels like a Viking reenactment. Imagine if people on *Coronation Street* acted like this. Because it's Klingon, we accept it.

IAN It's dull, innit.

NICK What I'd give for one Shatner dropkick.

Close Encounters

FACE TO FACE WITH THE BIGGEST STARS

HAYLEY ATWELL

The '40s fireball heads west in *Agent Carter* season two

Words by Tara Bennett // Photography by Helen McCordle

Some days playing a clever, ravishing super spy can get to you, as actress Hayley Atwell can attest. On a crisp autumn evening on the Universal Studios backlot where the second season of *Agent Carter* is in its late days of production, Atwell has been engaging in derring-do all day and frankly, it's made her punchy. Currently crammed into a gorgeous 1938 Packard Super 8 next to longtime friend James D'Arcy (who plays Howard Stark's butler Jarvis), the pair fill time between takes teasing each other in cockney voices, pulling faces and pretend-leaning into perilous turns in the road with shouted warnings of "Big corner!" Diva behaviour is nowhere to be seen, but Atwell's natural goofiness is on full display. And she promises SFX we'll soon see more of that side of her in Peggy as well. "Season two is more fluid," she says. "Carter can be goofier, funnier and so you see a different strength in her. It's a natural evolution of someone who's going into another period of their life."



Season two finds your character newly relocated to Los Angeles. What's her mindset?

She's evolved to a place where she knows what she's capable of. She's tested the water to see how far she can go. She's pretty dynamic and a lot more confident in herself. We explored the psychological and emotional costs of losing Steve [Rogers], so in season two she's ready to move on, whether that's romantically or just emotionally, for herself. She's in a better place.

What do you think is Peggy's appeal?

She's a positive, warm heroine that has good relationships with other women and isn't competitive, or talking about the guy all the time.

Yet Peggy is a woman who works incredibly well with men so long as they see her value.

Yes, there is a tendency with a strong female character to pitch her against the men as if she hates men. That's absolutely not what Peggy is. She's a humanitarian and she's got relationships with men, Howard Stark [Dominic Cooper] being one and Jarvis the other.

Howard put Peggy through the wringer in season one. What has she learned from that wild ride?

She's become more accepting of people's fragility, and her own, and not to have such high expectations of people. There's a lightness to her and she's been able to let a lot go, but retain the ambition to get ahead in her work and continue with the same purpose that Steve Rogers was inspiring in her. It's without the feeling that the world owes her anything or that people close to her weren't going to make huge mistakes. She comes to terms with the intentions behind what they do, so in a way she's a bit wiser.

Jarvis and Peggy built the foundation of a friendship last season. How does he assist her this year?

The main thing is she comes out to LA and he's already here. I think she learned from the first season that when he says the world wants to help you and let people help, that she is still coming to terms with Jarvis as someone she can rely on. It's been very hard for her to digest because it's been so ingrained in her that she is essentially on her own and people close to her are at risk of being harmed. Season two is slightly lighter in that respect.

In the MCU and the TV series, Peggy is a very in-the-moment character. Is some backstory coming?

We see a little bit of her background and how she experiences grief at a young age. It gives her a drive and then Steve Rogers gives her a drive. She doesn't have particularly exceptional martial arts skills like Black Widow, and she's not a genius like [new villain] Whitney Frost, but she has a strength of spirit. Because of that she has a very strong sense of self and identity. We see in the second season more of what shaped her and where did this bizarre woman come from.

Does exposing that vulnerability make Peggy even more accessible to audiences?

Yes, because it's actually out of tragedy that she rose like a phoenix, rather than she is just invincible. I think audiences find her more relatable because it comes out of tragedy. It's a wonderful message: it's actually sadness that shapes you and it's your choice what you do with it. You can't control what happens to you but you can control how you react.

What has the incredible reception to Peggy meant to you personally?

It's been a very positive and warm response from people. It's very heartwarming because you feel like you are doing something for some people that has some value. ☀

Agent Carter begins on Fox in the UK on 24 January, and airs on ABC in the US.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Actress

Born

→ 5 April 1982

From

→ London, England

Greatest hits

→ *The Duchess*,
Captain America: The First Avenger,
Black Mirror,
Cinderella

Random fact

→ Atwell may train hard for her Carter physique, but she only fuels up on vegetarian fare; a lifestyle choice since the age of eight.

"WE SEE
IN THE
SECOND
SEASON
MORE OF
WHAT
SHAPED
HER"

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE
AND ZOMBIES

AUSTEN TRANSLATION

You've never seen Jane Austen done like this before...
Pride And Prejudice And Zombies director
Burr Steers talks to Ian Berriman



He'll be back,
probably.



Someone better have the smelling salts ready. Back in 1995, a BBC adaptation of *Pride And Prejudice* gave some Jane Austen purists an attack of the vapours when Colin Firth emerged from a lake in a dripping wet shirt. They may require resuscitation after they see the brooding Mr Darcy jabbing a broken glass in someone's throat, or clap eyes on the Bennet sisters swaggering into a society ball – concealed knives strapped to their thighs – and taking out a bunch of zombies with samurai swords.

Not that the arrival of a movie called *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies* should really take anyone by surprise. It was back in 2009 when Seth Grahame-Smith's mash-up novel – which interpolates the undead into the original text of Austen's classic 1813 novel – became a phenomenon. The book's journey to the big screen has been unusually protracted, so much so that Grahame-Smith's similarly historically cheeky *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* beat it to the punch by nearly four years. But the man who's finally made it happen, writer/director Burr Steers (*17 Again*), had no hesitation about taking the project on.

"With George Romero's movies," Steers says, thinking back to the likes of the director's 1968 classic, *Night Of The Living Dead*, "they're set in that repressed American society; then they stick these agents of complete chaos into it and overthrow white male hegemony... that's a great setup! And here you've got Regency England. There's no more repressed society that you could possibly have, and then to throw zombies into it was a great idea."

As someone whose first studio movie was the romcom *How To Lose A Guy In 10 Days*, Steers is an admirer of Austen's Regency romance.

"The template is something that everything is based on," he explains. "*Pride And Prejudice*

always works – whether it's *Bridget Jones's Diary* or PD James's sequel – in all its different forms, if you can stick to that, and you have the characters, and you're true to the characters."

And on rewriting an earlier iteration of the screenplay, Steers was surprised to see how easily zombies can be slotted into that structure.

"There was a natural place to put all this action," he explains. "In all of Austen's books, the Napoleonic Wars are going on. They're never explained – they just are. You have these handsome officers riding through. So you remove the Napoleonic Wars, and you stick in the zombie plague and the coming zombie apocalypse. There's a place for it structurally, as a backdrop. And then you have *Pride And Prejudice* playing out in the foreground."

Steers says that the key to his take on the material was to draw further on the original text, and establish a believable milieu.

"I went back to Austen more. For interstitial scenes, I really got into some of her other writings for dialogue. The idea was that you create this world where this zombie plague happened 80 years before this alternate reality, and then you stage *Pride And Prejudice* in it."

When it comes to the tone of the film, you may be surprised to find that it's not as goofy as that provocative title might suggest.

"The mantra throughout was that there is no 'wink,'" Steers says. "You play it straight. Then you're invested in the characters, and are actually frightened for them. And the humour isn't broad, it's stuff that arises because of the imaginary circumstances that you've set up."

In preparing to make the film, Steers went back and looked at every one of the previous major adaptations of Austen's novel. Of them all, he was most influenced by the 1940 film version starring Laurence Olivier.

"The script is very funny. And they cast Mary Boland, who was this great old Broadway actress, as Mrs Bennet. She had this very fast, →

WC Fields delivery, which was really something that stuck in my mind."

Another major inspiration was a 1968 period drama by British director Tony Richardson.

"One of the things I had firmly in mind as I was doing was it *The Charge Of The Light Brigade*. That was such a dry movie, and so great. Actually, all the movies from the end of the British New Wave – the Richard Lester films, and things like that – were tonally something that I was influenced by."

MATHESON MATTERS

When it came to the zombies, the director was keen to ground them in reality, a decision which led him to research the effects of both meth drinking and rabies infection. He was also keen to have an original spin on the undead – something that's always a pretty good idea nowadays, when the horror landscape is so crowded with shambling ghouls...

"My zombies are more *I Am Legend*," Steers explains, doffing his hat to Richard Matheson's classic 1954 novel – which, though technically a vampire tale, was also a major inspiration for George Romero. "They're more cognisant and have retained more of who they were. My whole idea was that the zombies now think of themselves as being a competitive race with humans. Some of them can 'pass' now, if they haven't been bitten on the face. They've evolved."

Pitted against those zombies are a predominantly British cast, including Sam Riley as Mr Darcy and Matt Smith as Mr Collins. Front and centre is Lily James, perhaps best known for her role as Lady Rose MacClare in *Downton Abbey*.

"She's so charismatic," Steers says of his female lead. "She comes into a room and it's palpable... It's like tripping on a light."

James plays Elizabeth Bennet, who while still every bit as quick-witted as Austen's original heroine, has been raised with a very different idea of what constitutes "suitable female accomplishments" – one that includes firing muskets from horseback and roundhouse-kicking people in the face. As Lizzy's father



Before the carnage starts we're thinking...

“The young women are the fiercest warriors as well”

states in the film, "My daughters are trained for battle, not the kitchen."

"It's really expounding on Austen's themes of young women being empowered," Steers explains. "Only now they're not just the brightest people in the room – at least in Lizzy's case – but they're the fiercest warriors as well."

So can you go so far as to say that *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies* is a feminist movie?

"Yeah, I think you can easily go that far," Steers says. "I mean, they're not waiting for men to give them the opportunity. They're going out and getting it for themselves."

Much of the ass-kicking that results was filmed in just the sort of National Trust properties where you'd expect to see a straight production of Austen being shot – the likes of West Wycombe Park in Buckinghamshire. It sounds like it was an amusingly subversive business to be part of.

"Invariably, in these estates, the families that used to own them have been given an apartment somewhere on the grounds, and they're hovering about. And explaining to them what we were doing..."

Steers trails off and laughs. What? Did he feel the need to cover up the words "*And Zombies*" when showing people the script?

"Exactly! You'd be mumbling at the end! You'd go, '*Pride And Prejudice And ahumhum!*'"

Having smuggled zombie carnage into the stately homes of England, Steers is now looking forward to pulling off a Trojan horse manoeuvre when the movie opens, and sneaking a little classic literature into the lives of an audience who'd normally never dream of picking up a 19th century novel.

"In America, you're pulling in a demographic that don't know Austen," the director explains, sounding more than a little appalled. "I mean, they were polling them, and only 10% of American teens have ever heard of Jane Austen or *Pride And Prejudice*. It's depressing... though as you listen to Trump's campaign, it's not that surprising, I guess! The fact is, we've made a real movie within a genre movie. It is Austen dialogue. That we were able to smuggle in so much Jane Austen and still make it a commercial movie is kinda fun. It's a testament to how strong the characters are."

Pride And Prejudice And Zombies opens in cinemas on 12 February.



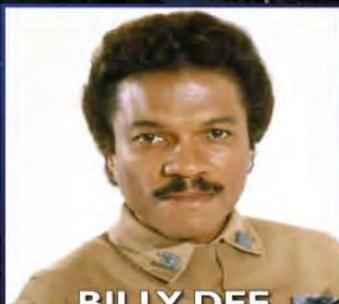
"We shall defend this lovely house to the death!"

LONDON FILM & COMIC CON

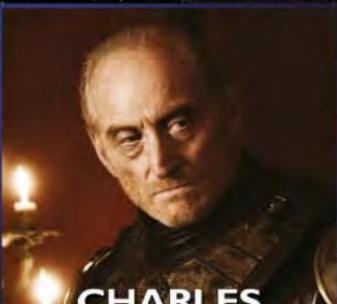
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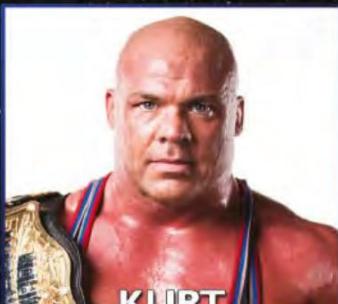
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STAR WARS



IAN WHYTE
STAR WARS VII



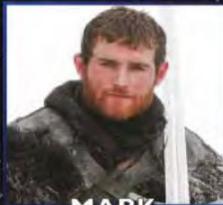
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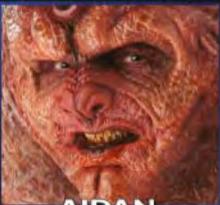
MARK STANLEY
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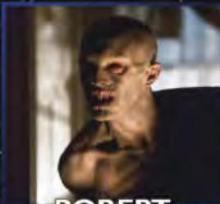
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Brought To Book

THE SFX AUTHOR INTERVIEW

BRANDON SANDERSON

The author with two novels coming out in the space of three months...

Words by Jonathan Wright // Photography by Kevin Nixon

How do you write yourself back into a book when you've had to take time out to complete another project? This was a problem Brandon Sanderson hit when, after breaking off from *Shadows Of Self* to complete his work finishing Robert Jordan's *Wheel Of Time* sequence, he returned to a novel set in his own *Mistborn* universe.

Sanderson had lost momentum. His solution was to start writing the sequel, *Bands Of Mourning*, "to get myself back in to the characters". Things went well, so well that he kept going until he'd finished the book. He then went back to complete *Mourning*'s predecessor, *Shadows Of Self*.

"This was feeling really good, [I thought] I'm going to get ahead," Sanderson remembers. "Except [my publishers] got the books and, 'Well, we'll just publish these three months apart, this is great.' I called my agent and complained, and he said, 'You can't hand them a plate full of money and say, by the way, you can't use it until next year.'"

Sitting in a central London hotel, Sanderson laughs as he tells this story against himself. Then again, there were definite upsides to this situation. In particular, working in this unusual way changed Sanderson's perspective on one of his main characters, Marasi.

In the steampunk-tinged novels, she's one of the sidekicks to a noble-born lawman, Wax Ladrion, a man with a huge capacity for creating chaos. Marsai admires Wax to the point of hero worship, but there are contradictions here. "It's this weird push and pull with her being in his shadow, but also being his minder at the same time," says Sanderson.

This isn't always easy, as the aftermath of one incident reveals. "[She thinks] 'I'm so glad that he stopped the criminal, but there are buildings on fire, there are people who got shot.' It's like the aftermath of when the superhero comes to town," says Sanderson.

BEST LAID PLANS

For many writers, altering a character's trajectory after writing such a scene wouldn't necessarily be a big deal. Sanderson, though, describes himself, using George RR Martin's terminology, as an "architect" – someone who does a lot of planning, rather than a "gardener", a writer who starts work and sees what develops.

Just how much of an architect is evident in the way Sanderson's books relate to each other. The *Mistborn* sequence, for instance, began with an epic fantasy trilogy. Ahead, Sanderson hints, lie an urban fantasy trilogy and science fiction novels, with "magic continuing through as the thread". And if that sounds grand, most of his fiction is

set in a universe called the Cosmere, a kind of hidden epic that will eventually run to 30-plus novels.

As to what first inspired this design work, Sanderson remembers reading Barbara Hambly's *Dragonsbane* (1985) as a teenager. "I was trying to read other things and they were mostly about boys my age," he says. "And I joke that I read three books where they have a pet dog, and you just know the dog's going to die. I'm like, 'Why am I reading these books about kids leading boring lives like mine whose pets die?'"

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The appeal of *Dragonsbane* wasn't just in its fantastical elements, but in it being about a powerful witch "choosing between her career and her family". The book made Sanderson see his own mother, an accountant, in a new light. "It's this weird thing where I looked through someone else's eyes and the world opened up to me," he says.

Pretty soon, Sanderson was not only reading fantasy, but writing it too. At university, though, he studied chemistry, in part because his mother pushed him towards being a doctor. "The arts are not something she really understood," says Sanderson. "She said, 'You know how doctors all go and play golf all the time? They have so much free time to play golf, you could just write books.'"

But the "busy work" of chemistry, was something he found miserable. Relief came when Sanderson, a Mormon, went to Korea to do missionary work. "I spent two years over there so happy to be away from chemistry," he says. The experience was valuable in other ways too. "Learning another culture and language," he says, "I'll tell you, if you want to be a fantasy writer, there's probably nothing better than to go and see first hand how differently people can think, yet still be people."

Returning to the US, he carried on studying, but also got a graveyard shift job in a hotel, where he had time to write. Thirteen books in, his sixth novel, *Elantris* (2005), sold. By this time, he says, "I was already a working professional."

Not that being professional was the point. Sanderson says he can imagine another life where he wrote all his life and never found success, but dropped dead at the age of 95 leaving a cupboard full of unpublished manuscripts. "[I thought] I'll be more of a success as that person who wrote 50 unpublished novels, I'll have enjoyed my life more than if I just give up now and never write another one," he says. "That was the risk I was willing to take." ●

The Bands Of Mourning is published on 28 January.

Biodata

Occupation

→ Novelist

Born

→ 19 December 1975

From

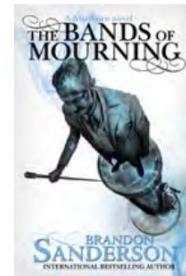
→ Nebraska

Greatest Hits

→ Sanderson has twice won the David Gemmell Legend Award, for *The Way Of Kings* and *Words Of Radiance*.

Random Fact

→ Sanderson had no idea that Harriet McDougal, Robert Jordan's wife and editor, was going to ask him to complete the *Wheel Of Time* sequence. "It was one of those your-life-changes-in-an-eye-blink moments."



"I'M LIKE,
'WHY AM I
READING THESE
BOOKS ABOUT
KIDS LEADING
BORING LIVES?'"



SUSPIRIA





Splatter master Dario Argento tells Calum Waddell all about the film that put his unique mix of art and arteries on the movie map...

Legendary nightmare maker Dario Argento was already a bigger name than the Pope in his native Italy when he began production on his first supernatural horror film, *Suspiria*. Coming from the hit giallo *Deep Red* (1975), which had spawned a chart-topping soundtrack album and made its director as iconic as a rock star, all eyes were waiting for his next move. What transpired was against everyone's expectations: a story focused on an American ballet student who arrives in Munich, West Germany, only to discover that her new university is actually the hiding place for a coven of witches. Chief among the ancient evildoers is Helena Markos, also known as Mater Suspiriorum, the Mother of Sighs, and the oldest and wisest of a trio dubbed the Three Mothers – a group responsible for all of the malevolence in the world.

So far so straightforward, but very little in *Suspiria* makes sense – from random rooms full of barbed wire to the fact a sect of timeless tormentors manages to remain hidden when they slaughter most of the pupils who attend the college that they use to mask their operations. But to criticise such narrative failings seems futile given Argento's masterpiece is so stylish, so scary, a heady mix of aesthetic beauty and startling setpieces.

It was an experiment in style," laughs Argento when *SFX* catches up with him. "We processed the film in Technicolor and we were one of the last productions to do that. It was expensive but I wanted the colour to really jump out at the audience. It was such a grand style, a big task... It is very Italian, I think. It is horror but it is art. I wanted it to have the appearance of an old Walt Disney film such as *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs*. But it also needed to have that tone. You should know that this is a very simple story of good and evil. It was a flamboyant film and I do not think I could ever make a movie like it again. Even now, though, the fans ask me, 'When will you do another picture like *Suspiria*?' [laughs]" →



Jessica Harper's going to need a strong drink.



Translating as “sighs” in Latin, the title *Suspiria* was probably every bit as mysterious as the macabre thrills that its poster promised (“The only thing more terrifying than the last 12 minutes of this film are the first 92”). A blockbuster-sized success in its native Italy, Argento’s gruesome gem also looked to a more international audience by casting an American in the leading role. Taking on the part of Suzy Bannion, the New York expat who finds herself battling against a satanic sect, was Jessica Harper – a respected actress at the time thanks to her turns in the controversial sex comedy *Inserts* (1975) and Brian De Palma’s beloved musical *Phantom Of The Paradise* (1974).

She even looked a little bit like Snow White, which is why she was so good for the role,” admits Argento. “I needed a strong female for *Suspiria*. It was about this innocent young girl who is forced to battle this much older, evil witch. We had to sympathise with her naivety but also admire her beauty and her elegance. So Jessica was perfect – she is one of my favourite actresses.”

Indeed, despite the fact that *Suspiria* begins with an especially brutal double-murder of two beautiful female students, it is difficult to deny that the story – as with a lot of Argento’s work – is all about a strong young woman overcoming the odds to defeat an overarching authority. From Daria Nicolodi in *Deep Red* and Harper in *Suspiria* to Jennifer Connelly in *Phenomena* (1985) and Cristina Marsillach in *Opera* (1987), Argento – who is often accused of misogyny – has rarely shied away from presenting genre heroines with strong and powerful personalities.

“I still hear this, all these decades later. ‘Ah, you hate women because you kill them in your films,’ chuckles Argento. “I have to say, ‘No, no you don’t understand. I tell stories about women in all of their many forms! In my movies they are the heroine but they may also be the victim or the murderer.’ I consider myself to be a specialist in telling stories about



women. I love women and that is why they are frequently the main focus in my films. I enjoy filming women – and this is true of any artist. Look at the way women have been captured and framed by all of the great painters back through the ages. In *Suspiria* there are only two men and they both have a physical weakness of some kind: one is blind and the other is mute. In real life I think men are weaker

than women and this is why, in *Suspiria*, where the characters are all strong females the males had to be seen as totally submissive.”

Amazingly, despite the adult imagery in *Suspiria*, Argento also reveals that his initial plans for the movie were more PG-orientated.

“*Suspiria* was originally aimed at children,” he states. “I wrote the first version with these pupils at a dance school who were between eight and 12 years old. Some of the people who were financing the film read the script and said, ‘No, no, no – we do not want something for kids. We want a full-blooded horror movie!’ So I decided to change it but to keep that early spirit alive – and this is why you sometimes see the students in *Suspiria* acting like children among each other and fighting and squabbling.”

No discussion of *Suspiria* can be had without mention of its electrifying prog-rock soundtrack courtesy of Goblin, the legendary Italian experimentalists led by keyboardist and composer Claudio Simonetti. Rumour has it that Argento played it on set, at full blast, in-between takes to frighten his young cast...

“That is such a good story that I don’t want to confirm or deny it,” teases Argento. “I started working with Claudio on *Deep Red* and I knew that he was the right person for *Suspiria*. The score for *Suspiria* takes you to another world. In fact, it sounds like music that has come from another universe. John

DIRECTOR’S CUTS

Those hands sure look familiar...

→ Every time you see a pair of black gloves appear in a Dario Argento movie, doubtlessly wielding a weapon of some kind, then take heed: the hands in question belong to the director himself. And *Suspiria* is no different – that really is Argento plunging a knife into youthful female flesh throughout the film! “Yes, okay, so why do I do this?” questions the director. “Well, it is because I am still the best killer in history [laughs]. I have had a lot of criticism for this but, honestly, that is the real reason it is my hands. I don’t think anyone else can do a murder scene as well as me!”





Never mind the script, just enjoy the imagery.

“Suspiria was originally aimed at children”

Carpenter and many other filmmakers have told me how much it has inspired them.”

Set in West Germany, and focusing on a secretive cult that is led by an authoritarian presence, *Suspiria* can also be viewed as a none-too-subtle commentary on the then-prevalent split in the European country that hosts its gruesome action. Filmed during an era where the Berlin Wall stood tall, and no one could predict an end to the Cold War, Argento admits that his Munich location was very much on purpose.

“I find contradictions fascinating,” he maintains. “I went to East Germany and it was supposed to be about equality but you still saw people who were poor and everyone was suppressed. But the government was trying to hide this. It was a ‘secret’ that people were unhappy – even though you

THE SUSPIRIA SEQUELS

Probably shouldn't have bothered with the third one...

→ After *Suspiria* made truckloads of money at the Italian box office, and cemented itself as a popular worldwide release, Argento embarked upon *Inferno*. Unlike *Suspiria*, *Inferno* was produced by CBS-Fox in America – which might explain the movie's New York setting. A classic in its own right, *Inferno*'s story of spells and spirits is almost as effective as that of its predecessor. Alas, released in 1980, *Inferno* underperformed at the box office. It took Argento until 2007 to make the concluding part, *The Mother Of Tears*, which is drained of colour, life and general excitement. Set in Rome and filled with bad acting and awful FX, it was proof for many that Argento had finally lost his way.



could see it right before your eyes. So Germany was very interesting. I explored a little bit of that in *Suspiria* and then when I produced *Demons*, which was also in West Germany, we had the evil spill over into the areas of city life and commerce. When I did *Phenomena* it was in Switzerland, which is another example of contradictions: everything is neat, clean and tidy – it all looks perfect but underneath it is full of perversions. The banking and the capitalism is insane. So I have criticised all sorts of politics in my work.”



Released in Italy in February 1977, *Suspiria* was an overnight phenomenon and one of the biggest grossing releases of the year. Unfortunately, in America, its distributor – CBS-Fox (who were embarrassed enough to remove their logo and name from the release) – chose to market the film as a tacky splatter-shocker, far removed from its arty avant-garde leanings. Despite being a moneymaker, critics and audiences were generally perplexed – with future Master of Horror Mick Garris writing an especially damning review for *Cinefantastique* (the filmmaker now claims it to be among his personal favourites). Meanwhile, indigenous audiences in Rome were thirsty for a sequel – which led to 1980's underappreciated and equally esoteric masterwork *Inferno*.

“If *Suspiria* began life as my horror film for children then *Inferno* was my nightmare fairytale for adults,” nods Argento. “It is more to do with alchemy and demonic practices. I replaced the resilient Jessica Harper character with a weak and shy male – which seemed to take the audience by surprise [laughs]. But I wanted *Inferno* to be very different from *Suspiria* – it does not even have Goblin on the soundtrack. You see, I did not want to make the same film twice.”

Nearly four decades later *Suspiria* remains capable of scaring even the hardest of horror fans, while also amazing arthouse connoisseurs with some of the most adventurous and outrageously colourful

camera calisthenics ever committed to celluloid.

“Above all my other films, it is the one I will probably be remembered for,” concludes Argento. “I have been trying to top it ever since I finished it [laughs]. Maybe one day I will get there.” ●



Must have been a knot-savvy boy scout around.



Even the staircases are wacky!



These scenes are amazing in colour, honest!

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STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

A sequel of the First Order

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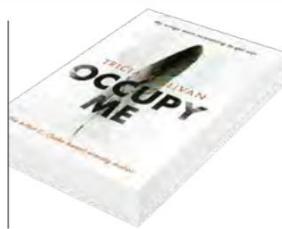
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→ RATING EXPLAINED

★★★★★ SUPERB

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★★★ AVERAGE

★★★★★ POOR

★★★★★ TERRIBLE

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

The Force is with it



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

12A | 135 minutes

► Director JJ Abrams

► Cast Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Oscar Isaac

➲ This really is uncharted

territory – not since 1983 has a trip to that galaxy far, far away been a genuine journey to the unknown. Yes, the exact route we were taking in the prequels was a mystery, but the key facts – Anakin turning to the Dark Side, the Emperor making a land grab for everything – were already set down in *Star Wars* gospel. So watching *The Force Awakens* – a *Star Wars* movie where you actually have no idea what's coming next – is a slightly unsettling experience.

Luckily, it's also a totally exhilarating one. *Episode VII* is such a worthy successor to the original trilogy that it's difficult to

imagine how it could have turned out much better. After three years of ever-growing hype, JJ Abrams has pretty much nailed it, making a film that's simultaneously reverent to the source material, yet prepared to strike out on its own and be its own thing.

Walking that tightrope was arguably the movie's biggest challenge. It would have been so easy to simply make this a cover version of *Star Wars*' greatest hits, to replay classic moments with different characters in new situations. And indeed, there are plenty of moments in *The Force Awakens* when the echoes of the original trilogy are so loud as to be deafening: droids that are crucial to the plot; giant, planet-smashing enemy installations; a small, wise alien with a hotline to the Force; a bar populated with a wonderfully imaginative alien menagerie. But then, every time you think you know where it's going, the movie goes off and gleefully turns your



Right Guard users, obviously.

expectations on their heads. The result is that *The Force Awakens* is genuinely full of surprises.

From possibly the finest, most urgent opening of any *Star Wars* movie – one that comes with a beautiful nod to the original film – *The Force Awakens* makes you feel you're being taken on a journey, where the characters' actions have genuine consequences. As with *A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, those first steps on the desert world of Jakku, where runaway Stormtrooper Finn (John Boyega) lands in the orbit of scavenger Rey (Daisy Ridley) and ball droid BB-8,

“Difficult to imagine how it could have turned out better”

feel like a lifetime ago once the final credits roll, because so much has happened in between.

The story is allowed to evolve organically, via a series of intriguing McGuffins (Luke



“Don't pinch my helmet again!”



Skywalker!), and without resorting to too many of the ludicrous twists of fate that bogged down the prequels. While the movie has the challenge of kickstarting a plot that's laid dormant for 30 years, it never resorts to infodumps, drip-feeding key info at the right moments. Three decades may have passed since the second Death Star went kablooie, but there's a definite dramatic throughline here, 38-year-old character arcs that are more than tenuous thematic links.

Most importantly, *The Force Awakens* totally transports you to

another galaxy, making you forget about the real world for two hours. You frequently find yourself with a grin wider than Nien Nunb's jowls as the Millennium Falcon does some nifty aerobatics, or Han Solo and Chewbacca banter like they've never been away. There are more laugh-out-loud funny lines in the first 15 minutes of *The Force Awakens* than the prequels managed in six hours, with the characters bouncing off each other in a way we haven't seen since *The Empire Strikes Back*. You're instantly reminded how wonderful *Star Wars* can be when putting

memorable people (and aliens) at the forefront of the action is a priority. And beyond the fun and the humour, *The Force Awakens* manages to be genuinely moving at times – it's a hardy soul who won't find themselves with a bit of dust in their eye when Han and Leia reunite for the first time – and it isn't afraid to put you through the emotional wringer. Abrams the director excels here, knowing all the right buttons to push and when to do so. As a self-avowed *Star Wars* fan, staying suitably objective must have been one hell of a challenge. →

WORTH THE BOTHAN?

SPOILER
WARNING!

Ten big questions from Episode VII



- How does Max von Sydow's old man from the opening scene know Luke Skywalker? Why was he entrusted with his whereabouts?
- How did Poe Dameron escape from the crashing TIE Fighter, make his way across Jakku, and find his way back to the Resistance?
- Is Supreme Leader Snoke a Sith Lord? And, seeing as we only saw him as a hologram, where is he based?
- How did Snoke entice Kylo Ren (Han and Leia's son, Ben) to the Dark Side? Are any of the Jedi-in-training Ren turned on still alive?
- If the First Order is such a big threat, why is the Republic leaving the Resistance to battle them single-handed?
- Is Rey Luke's daughter? If she isn't, who are/were her parents? Why did they abandon her on Jakku? And why does Leia embrace her like she knows her?
- Will Rey decide to train as a Jedi with Luke, or become full-time co-pilot of the Millennium Falcon with Chewbacca?
- We're assuming Ren and Hux (above) made it off Starkiller Base alive, but what about Captain Phasma? Did she escape that trash compactor?
- Has anyone had such high billing in a movie for as little screentime as Mark Hamill gets here? And what the hell has he been doing on that island all this time?
- Is there anything in *Star Wars* mythology that might allow Han Solo to return as a rogueish smuggler ghost? Please?

Reviews

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CINEMA



Little Red Riding Hood would have cackled herself.

“This is how a modern *Star Wars* movie should be”

It's why enticing back *Star Wars'* original trio of stars (along with Chewie, C-3PO, R2-D2 and a few other old friends) was so crucial to the movie – they're the bedrock on which *The Force Awakens* is built. They never feel like they've been crowded into pointless cameos in the way C-3PO and R2-D2 were in the prequel trilogy. Plenty of water has flowed under the bridge, yet the relationship between Han and Leia is picked up in a place that makes sense, and the old chemistry is still there. Harrison Ford in particular is wonderful in the role that launched him as a mega-star, the old Han Solo twinkle back with a vengeance. Pulling on Solo's jacket for the first time in 32 years, he looks way more comfortable than he did reprising his other most iconic role in *Indiana Jones And The Crystal Skull*, yet the old scoundrel charm is bolstered with extra world-weariness, and irritability, all that extra mileage clearly having had an impact.

But *The Force Awakens* isn't

really about the old guard, and it's a testament to Abrams and his writing partner, *Empire Strikes Back* scripter Lawrence Kasdan, that come the end of the movie, you care about the two new leads nearly as much as characters you've known for over 30 years. Finn and Rey aren't just retreads of *Star Wars* characters we've seen before – their circumstances and traits are entirely new. Boyega has genuine movie star charisma as Finn, while Ridley, in arguably the most challenging role in the movie, plays Rey with a mix of gritty, survive-at-any-cost ingenuity and wide-eyed wonder. Honourable mentions should also go to a pair of fellow newbies: the pirate Maz Kanata (a fun mix of wise old sage

and comedy relief, played by a performance-captured Lupita Ny'ong'o) and BB-8, who – with apologies to Wilson from *Castaway* – is undoubtedly the most endearing sphere ever to feature on screen.

The baddies also emerge from *The Force Awakens* in credit, which is quite a feat considering they have the unenviable task of picking up the mantle from Darth Vader – a fact that the movie tacitly acknowledges. The First Order turn out to be the Empire-plus. They have the same military aesthetic and hardware, given a 21st century update, but their Stormtroopers can actually hit their targets, and they're way more brutal than their Imperial predecessors – one nighttime assault on a village is genuinely chilling. In Kylo Ren (Adam Driver), they have an amazing figurehead, part petulant kid (his tantrums are spectacular), part dangerous, manipulative Dark Side warrior. It's easy to see why Disney put him front and centre of their marketing campaign. It's just



BB-8: got balls.

a shame that Captain Phasma (Gwendoline Christie), with that already iconic silver Stormtrooper armour, isn't given more to do.

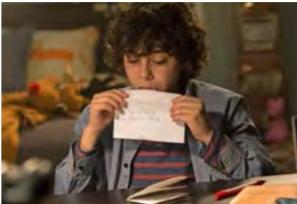
But for all it gets right on the storytelling front, the main reason *The Force Awakens* feels so *Star Warsy* is the look and feel of the film. From the Stormtroopers and TIE Fighters to the tactile alien landscapes, this is how a modern *Star Wars* movie should be. Much has been made of Abrams's efforts to get back to a more practical style of filmmaking, eschewing the CG-heavy look of the prequels, and it works. In fact, the puppet creatures are generally more successful than the computer-generated ones (Maz Kanata is the wonderful exception), though the digital effects excel when it comes to the spaceships, as Abrams shoots the Millennium Falcon, X-Wings and the rest in ways that make your heart soar.

Why not the full five stars? We'd have liked to see more of the underused Oscar Isaac, whose Poe Dameron has the potential to be a great, Han Solo-ish pilot; for such an important character, First Order puppetmaster Supreme Leader Snoke (a mo-capped Andy Serkis) isn't realised as well as he perhaps could have been; and the movie's big shock character death isn't given the weight and resonance it really should have.

But *The Force Awakens* is as good as anyone could have realistically hoped, and sets things up beautifully for *Episode VIII*. Abrams asks plenty of questions that'll be bothering us for the next 18 months, as we rewatch and analyse the movie to death to work out what it all means. Rian Johnson, it's over to you... **Richard Edwards**

i Famous cameos include Simon Pegg, stars of *The Raid* and (possibly) Thomas Brodie-Sangster as an Imperial officer.

Reviews



"If you want to see Rudolph again..."

KRAMPUS

Jingle hell



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 98 minutes

► Director Michael Dougherty
► Cast Adam Scott, Toni Collette, David Koechner, Allison Tolman

➲ If you thought *Gremlins* had a twisted view of what makes a good Christmas, brace yourself for *Krampus*. Forged in the image of that Joe Dante classic, its assortment of festive fiends are a snowbound nightmare as young Max (Emjay Anthony) and his family battle the titular anti-Santa.

What's most surprising about *Superman Returns*/X-movies co-writer Michael Dougherty's film is just how dark he pushes the wintry frights. Early scenes recall *Home Alone* as Max's ma (Toni Collette) and pa (Adam Scott) wind up hosting half the family over the festive season. Squabbling kids and boozehappy aunts are the least of their problems, though, when Max inadvertently summons Krampus, a horned monstrosity with an army of razor-toothed nasties. When they're finally unmasked, these mostly-prosthetic critters are a grim delectation, while an animated interlude amps up the invention.

With its blizzards, creepy snowmen and gung-ho cast, there are moments where *Krampus* scrapes the underbelly of brilliance. A slow-burn mid-section and a try-hard climax limit its impact, meaning this isn't quite a festive classic, but it sleighs, ahem, slays the majority of recent Christmas movies. **Josh Winning**

IThe figure of Krampus stretches back centuries in Germanic folklore. 5 December is Krampus Night.



"Wait till I call that adoption agency!"

ATTACK ON TITAN Part One

Manga-based madness



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

15 | 98 minutes

► Director Shinji Higuchi
► Cast Haruma Miura, Kiko Mizuhara, Kanata Hongo

➲ Whether you know the source material or not, *Attack On Titan Part One* is a weird viewing experience. It's based on an epic Japanese action-horror saga, set in a future world where humans are preyed on by grotesque grinning giants – the Titans. The story has an avid fan-following as a manga and anime; this is the first of a two-part live-action version for cinemas. Warning to fans: this is an alternate-universe retelling, with massive changes to both story and characters.

It's a goofy bad movie, but one that's sporadically enjoyable and exciting. The effects are artificial but pleasingly inventive, not unlike old British TV SF. There are some design triumphs, like a glowering demonic mega-titan in a huge cloud of black smoke, and a chuckling monster baby.

What lets the film down are the long scenes with awkward young actors risibly trying to look hard and heroic, though a couple of one-note, cartoony characters become likeable through their sheer persistence. The story also doesn't go anywhere very much until a twist cliffhanger that's spectacular but unexplained.

Andrew Osmond

ALSO OUT THIS MONTH *The 5th Wave* (22 January), an adap of the YA book about children brainwashed to kill by alien invaders.

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MAZE RUNNER: THE SCORCH TRIALS

With no maze it loses direction



EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 1 FEBRUARY

2015 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

► Director Wes Ball

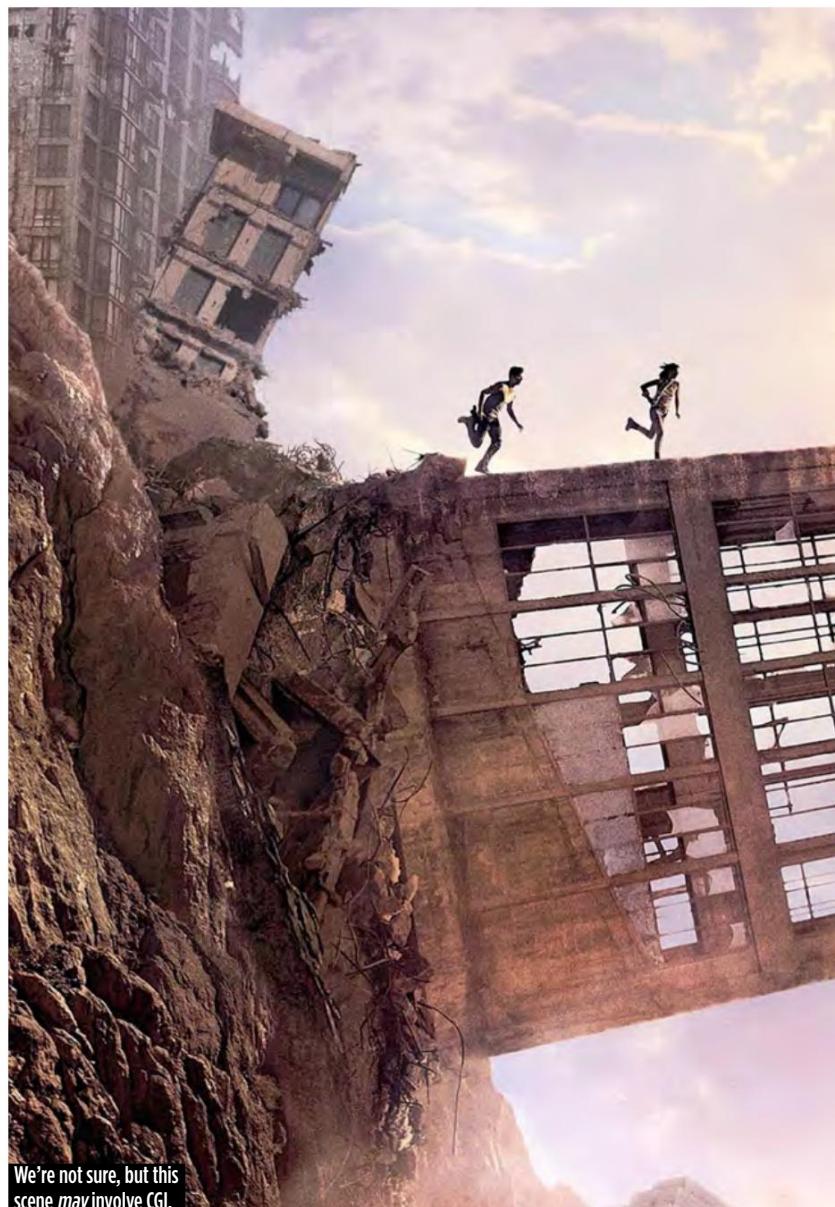
► Cast Dylan O'Brien, Kaya Scodelario, Thomas Brodie-Sangster, Patricia Clarkson, Ki Hong Lee, Aidan Gillen

“I never thought I'd say this,” sighs Maze escapee Minho at one point in *The Scorch Trials*, “but I really miss the Glade.” You may well agree.

The Maze Runner was an unexpected delight. One of a slew of *The Hunger Games* wannabes, it was surprisingly intelligent, sassy and original. Three things set it apart from its teens-in-dystopia ilk: its setting, its central mystery and its characters. It took place in a “Glade” enclosed by four, massive, edifice-like walls, where a group of youths had to survive. Every night, gates would open in the wall leading to a vast maze beyond. But would finding a way out of the maze before the gates shut again – and monsters were

unleashed into it – lead to escape? All this added up to a visually striking film with some intelligent, charismatic characters and excitingly different action scenes.

This sequel ejects everything that marked out the first film from the crowd. The Gladers have escaped the Maze into Generic Post-Apocalyptic World, where a virus is turning humans into zombies – here called Cranks – and evil scientists are harvesting children as a means of finding a cure. Our heroes start off in the clutches of the evil scientists, but escape as soon as they realise they're destined to end up like the victims in Michael Crichton's *Coma*. From there on in it's a travelogue of post-apocalyptic clichés: empty shopping malls filled with zombies, fallen skyscrapers, deserts, mountain encampments, abandoned warehouses, more deserts, crumbling bridges and even more deserts. They aim to join up with an anti-evil-scientists resistance



We're not sure, but this scene may involve CGI.

movement (because there's always a resistance movement) and they encounter an odious, drug-addled child-trafficker along the way (because there's always an... oh, hang on – maybe this is the one original bit in the movie).

The lead cast, who were so good in the first film, are given little to do here. Dylan O'Brien previously oozed charisma and cheeky charm as Thomas, the amnesiac teen who, on being transported to the Glade, shakes the lads already there out of their gloomy acceptance of the situation. Now Thomas is just a bore; a humourless



Car boot sales never fail to excite.

“Ejects everything that marked out the first film”

hero, driven by the plot rather than driving it, forced to frown like Mark Wahlberg in an M Night Shyamalan film because the script is giving him no idea what emotions he should be channelling.



The rest of the gang pretty much follow him in looking vaguely worried, or get killed. Occasionally Thomas Brodie-Sangster is allowed a line that reminds you he was the sarcastic one in the first film, but that's about as far as characterisation goes. Worst served is Kaya Scodelario as Teresa, who was all kinds of fun in the first film as a girl cynically introduced into the Glade to stir things up, but is here relegated by a dubious plot twist to being a massive sulk.

Some new characters are served slightly better, presumably on the

basis that as they're new the writers had better put some effort into introducing them. There are a few impressive post-apocalyptic vistas, a couple of decent action sequences, and a hint of bromance. It's all competently put together, well-acted and blandly watchable. But for the most part, it's depressingly derivative.

Extras The DVD features a commentary by director Wes Ball, scriptwriter TS Nowlin, producer Joe Hartwick Jr and editor Dan Zimmerman, plus 14 deleted and extended scenes (17 minutes), a gag reel and a gallery of concept art.

The Blu-ray has all that plus "Secrets Of The Scorch" (52 minutes), a choppy-edited Making Of, comprising an MTV featurette-style mix of talking heads soundbites and behind-the-scenes footage, broken down into the usual topics: inspiration, the design, the characters, a breakdown of a specific scene (in this case the fallen skyscraper chase). There's also half an hour's worth of FX-in-progress footage for various scenes. **Dave Golder**

Thomas Brodie-Sangster, Aidan Gillen and Nathalie Emmanuel have all appeared in Game Of Thrones but never met filming it.

A-MAZE-ING STORIES

Missing that maze? Here's a few more



THE AVENGERS: "THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT"

- In this 1966 ep Emma Peel inherits a house. Result! Except it's actually a computerised trap - one whose op-art corridors, forever leading Emma to the same point, are designed to drive her crackers.

DOCTOR WHO: "THE HORNS OF NIMON"

- Who's riffed on the legend of Theseus and the Minotaur numerous times. In this 1979 story, a bull-headed alien parasite rules from a "power complex" whose walls keep shifting, because it's essentially a giant positronic circuit.

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

- As part of the Triwizard Tournament, Harry must travel through this giant hedge maze, grown on Hogwarts' Quidditch pitch. In the movie, it attacks competitors by contracting its walls to crush them, and wrapping its roots around them.

LABYRINTH

- In Jim Henson's 1986 film, a girl encounters all manner of outlandish creatures as she traverses a huge maze to recover her baby brother from David Bowie's Goblin King.





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- 🍺 Jekyll/Hyde takes a squirt of a monocaine potion.
- 🍺 MI-O officer Sackler drops a pretentious literary quotation – the show-off.
- 🍺 Hyde roars his head off – or does a neck crack.
- 🍺 Someone says the Tenebrae catchphrase, "We are the flood!"
- 🍺 Jekyll discovers another previously unknown relative.
- 🍺 Someone erupts in maniacal laughter.
- 🍺 An action sequence goes into slow-motion, for no good reason.

His home-made potato wine had quite a kick.

JEKYLL AND HYDE Series One

Splitting heir

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 12 | DVD

► Creator Charlie Higson

► Cast Tom Bateman, Donald Sumpter, Natalie Gumede, Stephanie Hyam

➲ **It's a shame so much of the** attention focused on *Jekyll & Hyde* has concerned whether it's too scary for younger viewers, because Charlie Higson's superhero spin on Robert Louis Stevenson is light years ahead of ITV's last attempt to update a classic horror story – 2009's woeful *Demons*.

Not that the 459 complaints received by Ofcom after the show debuted in a 6.30 slot were *entirely* unwarranted, mind. As the original Jekyll's grandson, Robert (Tom Bateman), slowly discovers

the truth about his monstrous heritage, there's a gleeful relish to the way the show thrusts him into bar brawls and stabbings. And the series features a veritable cavalcade of inventively outlandish grotesques, from lobster-clawed henchman the Cutter (reminiscent of '70s *Doctor Who*'s Morbius monster) to giant lampreys and a rotting zombie siren.

Alongside this violence and putrescence, it's a sexily stylish show, too: the 1930s setting entails dapper tailoring, sleek vintage cars and art deco interiors. There are moments of cheeky wit – a sequence which apes *The Apprentice* is particularly amusing. And it keeps the viewer on their toes, thanks to some startling twists and no one-is-safe character deaths.

At the centre of all this, Tom Bateman is excellent, capable of both the Hugh Grant-esque vulnerability and Tom Hardy-ish muscularity the role demands; it's essential that his dark side is appealingly charismatic, and Bateman pulls that off by adding a dash of Heath Ledger's Joker to his smirking Hyde. Over the course of ten episodes Higson also introduces an impressive array of well delineated characters, many of them eminently loveable – Donald Sumpter is excellent as the no-nonsense Garson, Alfred to Jekyll's Batman; jolly-hockey-sticks legal assistant Hils (Ruby Bentall) is another standout. It's pleasing that so many of these characters are women, and that a prominent role is afforded to

Michael Karim as Jekyll's Ceylonese foster brother Ravi.

Issues? Well, they could ease off the Dutch angles – while they add to the comic book feel, at times it starts to become like watching '60s *Batman*. And while the strength of the characterisation ensures you stay invested as Jekyll is buffeted between secret government department MI-O and league of monsters Tenebrae, the plotting isn't always that scintillating – much of the to-ing and fro-ing boils down to whether Jekyll will *open a jar*, and on the rare occasions the series leaves London it rather loses its mojo. There's tremendous potential here, but if *Jekyll & Hyde* is going to have the longevity it deserves it needs to do more to show that it can weave interesting storylines that aren't founded on either Jekyll's backstory or the battle for his loyalties.

➲ **Extras** Four short featurettes (22 minutes). **Ian Berriman**

i Did you spot showrunner Charlie Higson making a couple of cameos? He plays a tramp with a colander on his head.



"Trampoline - weeeeeeeeeeee!"

THE VATICAN TAPES

The Dreck-sorcerist

★★★½ EXTRAS **★★★★★**
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
 2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD/download
 ▶ Director Mark Neveldine
 ▶ Cast Olivia Dudley, Michael Peña, Dougray Scott, Kathleen Robertson, Alison Lohman

⌚ **The Exorcist** casts a long shadow. Whatever your beliefs, Friedkin's masterpiece made the whole possession shebang seem plausible. Unfortunately, it's rendered virtually all such movies since rather redundant. *The Vatican Tapes* isn't going to change that.

A montage of security footage sets out the film's stall. Possessions are on the rise and the Catholic Church is monitoring the situation. After a car crash, sweet young Angela (Olivia Dudley) begins to act strangely, and paranormal events seem to follow in her wake. It's soon clear that Angela's not the woman she used to be...

Crank co-director Mark Neveldine tries to spice things up with flashy editing, but can't disguise the drab and clichéd nature of the material. Dougray Scott looks bored stiff throughout and it's all building up to the big exorcism scene, which is rendered hilarious when Angela starts gobbling out three eggs – presumably from one of hell's notorious flocks of damned chickens. Buy it and the yolk's on you.

► Extras Just a three-minute behind-the-scenes piece.

Will Salmon

i According to Olivia Dudley, the exorcism scene took eight days to shoot – out of a total of 22 for the whole film.



Xavier's new X-Men line-up needed some work.

THE RETURNED Series Two

Worth returning to? Absolutely

★★★★★ EXTRAS **★★★★★**
► RELEASED 11 JANUARY
 2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
 ▶ Director Fabrice Gobert
 ▶ Cast Céline Sallette, Swann Nambotin, Jenna Thiam, Yara Pilartz

⌚ If you're settling down to watch this French zombie drama, bring a jumper. *The Returned* has to be the coldest-feeling show on television, its palette full of gloomy greys, brittle snowdrifts and freezing mud. Some characters look so frozen and pale that you want to make them a cup of cocoa.

However, once you get past the plodding, bitter opening episode of *The Returned*'s second series, the chills are more than worth it. The first year ended with the back-

“ Haunting – will stay with you for a long time **”**

from-the-dead citizens of a small town disappearing as a dam burst and sank the place under a lake. We return several months later, with the returnees marooned on a lonely estate and the army on the prowl. More dead start arriving – including some total bastards – and a subsection of them are quiet, sinister zombies who don't even speak. What the hell is going on?

The good news is that we do actually find out. *The Returned* is virtually incomprehensible right up until the final two episodes, when finally – blessedly – the sun comes out from behind the clouds and all is made clear. Sure, there are some mysteries left unresolved when the final credits roll, but by and large the show does sign off with its central enigma solved. And a bloody satisfying one it is, too, from a haunting universe which will stay with you for a long time.

► Extras A quick reminder of the events of series one. **Jayne Nelson**

i As well as Mogwai's music, the series uses tracks by French band Steeple Remoove – now available on the LP "Position Normal".



The M20 slip road: flipping nightmare.

GAS-S-S-S

The Kids Are Alright

★★★★★ EXTRAS **★★★★★**
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
 1970 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD
 ▶ Director Roger Corman
 ▶ Cast Bob Corff, Elaine Giftos, Bud Cort, Talia Shire

⌚ In the late '60s, fortysomething B-movie king Roger Corman switched from Edgar Allan Poe adaptations to counter-culture movies – even going so far, in preparation for LSD flick *The Trip*, as to drop acid himself. Watching this post-apocalyptic black comedy, you may wonder if it hadn't worn off.

Set after the accidental release of a chemical weapon kills everyone over 25, it follows some hip young longhairs as they travel across the country, encountering fascistic American footballers, a country club run by Hells Angels, and a biker version of Poe. The script was rewritten during shooting, and the results are freewheeling to the point of aimlessness.

There are numerous moments of offbeat charm, like a dune buggy chase and a bloodless shoot-out which sees gunfire replaced with yelling the names of tough-guy actors. But you'll need a strong tolerance for flower power aphorisms – and casual rape jokes. Equal parts interesting and infuriating, *Gas-s-s-s* is very much a product of its time. **► Extras** A featurette about Corman's counter-culture films (nine minutes); two hour-long audio interviews with the director, from 1970 and 1991; gallery; trailer. **Ian Berriman**

i A final shot featuring 300 extras and closing comments by the voice of God was cut by studio AIP – to Corman's fury.

HEARTLESS

School of witchcraft and misery



RELEASED OUT NOW!

2014-2015 | N/A

Available to stream for free

- ▶ Directors Natasha Arthus, Kaspar Munk
- ▶ Cast Sebastian Jessen, Julie Zangenberg, Nicolaj Kopernikus, Julie Christiansen, Frederikke Dahl Hansen, Katrine Rosenthal

ALL 4 EXCLUSIVE What do you get if

you cross *Twilight*'s veggie vampires with a Nordic detective series? Well, maybe something a bit like *Heartless*. The question is, why would you want to?

Set in a prestigious boarding school, this eight-episode Danish drama (originally aired in two batches of five and three) follows twins Sofie (Julie Zangenberg) and Sebastian (Sebastian Jessen) as they try to navigate around power-mad prefects and strict

house rules to find a cure for their shared curse. They're afflicted with a hunger that drives them to feed off other people – specifically, to suck out other people's lifeforce through their mouths or, er, genitals, and if they suck too hard, their victims spontaneously combust. Obviously that puts a bit of a damper on their love lives, and they're keen to get the curse lifted. Their research has led them to the Ottmannsgaard school, but some of the other students have sinister secrets of their own, and if the twins' secret gets out, it'll get them killed.

Heartless is one of the first international TV shows to launch in the UK this January as part of Channel 4's new on-demand service Walter Presents, available free at all4.com/walterpresents – in case you're wondering, it's

named after exec Walter Iuzzolino, who's "curating" the slate. Unfortunately, though it has lots of potential for drama and heartbreak, it's not a very good advert for the channel's other offerings. Beneath the moody colour palette and grungy soundtrack, it hasn't got any of the intelligence of *The Killing*, or any of the fun schlockiness of something like *True Blood* – it's just a silly story about magic rapists looking for love. It's hard to get invested in any of the characters, because they're all horrible; not one of the twins' allies, lovers or enemies is worth rooting for, so even when the mystery is unravelling, it never feels like it matters.

It doesn't help that the twins themselves are too wrapped up in their doomed romances to do any proper investigating, so the show just doles out information in the form of historical flashbacks instead. There's a glimmer of

“It’s hard to invest in the characters, as they’re all horrible”

something interesting there, as several well-worn witch-hunting tropes get turned inside out, but before it can properly develop, it's pushed aside in favour of more whining. A lot of plot threads get similarly dropped along the way – a ghost shows up for one episode and is never mentioned again, for example – while the actual story unfolds so slowly you'd get the gist even if you just skipped straight to the finale after episode two.

The final episode ends on a cliffhanger, but even Edward Cullen at his sulkiest was more appealing than these guys, so it seems unlikely anyone'll be hungry for more. It's an obvious joke, but *Heartless* kind of sucks.

Sarah Dobbs

Shirley loathed being tripped up.

Other foreign dramas available via Walter Presents include German thriller *Deutschland 83* and French drama *Spin*.



The week in Beige World began to drag.

SOLE SURVIVOR

What Shatner Did Next



RELEASED 18 JANUARY

1970 | TBC | Blu-ray/DVD

(dual format)

- ▶ Director Paul Stanley
- ▶ Cast Vince Edwards, Richard Basehart, William Shatner, Lou Antonio

“A sort of *12 Angry Men* meets *The Twilight Zone*, *Sole Survivor* is an above-average TV movie with some agreeably novel twists.”

Seventeen years after it went down during World War Two, an American bomber is discovered in the Libyan desert. The only surviving member of the crew, who's now a general (Richard Basehart), travels to the area, where he's quizzed by investigators (Vince Edwards and William Shatner) as to how it ended up there. Skip to the next paragraph if you don't want to know why this is in *SFX*, but watching on are the ghosts of the rest of the crew, who didn't get out alive. And they're not very happy...

Shatner, not long done with the original *Star Trek*, is as appealing as ever – in fact, the whole cast is good. The film also benefits from an eerie desert shoot and a total absence of love interest.

Borderline fantasy, *Sole Survivor* is essentially a psychological study, focusing on the mind's grapples with choice, regret and consequence. It's just a bit stretched-out for what it is – *The Twilight Zone* would have done the story in 25 minutes.

Extras None. **Russell Lewin**

i In real life, the bomber "Lady Be Good" went missing in 1943 and wasn't found in the Libyan desert until 1958.



Aaaaaaaaah! There are no words...

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 18 JANUARY

2015 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

► Director Steve Oram

► Cast Steve Oram, Julian Rhind-Tutt, Lucy Honigman, Toyah Willcox, Julian Barratt, Noel Fielding

➲ What if modern human beings behaved like great apes? That's the premise behind this low-budget oddity, in which a cast of top British comedy talent communicate only in simian grunts. The opening scene, in which wannabe alpha male Smith (*Sightseers*' Steve Oram, who also directs) pisses on a photo of his ex, sets the tone for 80 minutes of animalistic shagging, shitting and shafting (one another).

Unfortunately, the "people are actually just like monkeys" satire misses the mark, leaving *Aaaaaaaaah!* feeling more like a

drama school workshop than a movie. Oram deserves credit for telling a coherent story of a tribal power play without even a subtitle, yet the world he's created never quite makes sense. Why would a species that poos on a piece of cling film in the kitchen have installed proper loos in their houses?

Aaaaaaaaah! is the sort of film that works much better on paper than on screen, and ultimately the only reason it'll linger in anyone's memory is that it'll top every alphabetical list of movies ever.

➲ Extras Extended versions of the fictional cooking show and sitcom seen in the film (14 minutes), plus the actors proving they can use English in "The Cast Speaks" (20 minutes). **Richard Edwards**

i *Aaaaaaaaah!*'s proggy score was created by King Crimson guitarist Robert Fripp - who is married to star Toyah Willcox.



Barry's flossing had gone badly wrong.

LAST SHIFT

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 18 JANUARY

2015 | 15 | DVD

➲ Like John Carpenter's 1976 classic, it's set in a police station that's being shut down, but *Last Shift* is less *Assault On Precinct 13* and more *Bombardment Of Jump Scares*.

Juliana Harkavy is solid as the rookie cop manning the desk as supernatural weirdness ensues, and the final twist is just one of several decent surprises. But after the backstory's teased out – Manson family types hung themselves in a cell – it's mostly just one freaky thing after another, with diminishing returns.

➲ Extras None. **Ian Berriman**



"Blimey, his gas bill is a lot!"

AIR

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 18 JANUARY

2015 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

➲ It's the near-future, and an ill-defined catastrophe has wiped out much of the world's population. The brightest and best are being kept in cryogenic suspension, and it's the job of Norman Reedus and Djimon Hounsou to make sure the brains trust are kept safe.

There's a lot of babble in this chamber piece, and it looks pretty dreary. But the performances of Reedus and Hounsou compensate a little for the clunky dialogue and undercooked twists.

➲ Extras Making Of; characters featurette. **Steve O'Brien**



But why's this film called *The Pool*?

THE POOL

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★

► RELEASED 11 JANUARY

2014 | 15 | DVD

➲ Just in case horror movies haven't already put you off ever going on a camping trip... In this Dutch horror, two families head off into the woods, pitch their tents on the banks of a lake, do some petty bickering... and get murdered.

There's an established template for this kind of thing, and *The Pool* doesn't really break any new ground, but it's worth watching for its unusual threat - there aren't many films about evil lakes - and queasy, nightmarish atmosphere.

➲ Extras Just the trailer. **Sarah Dobbs**



Some trees are well weird.

ALIEN EXTINCTION

★ EXTRAS ★★★★

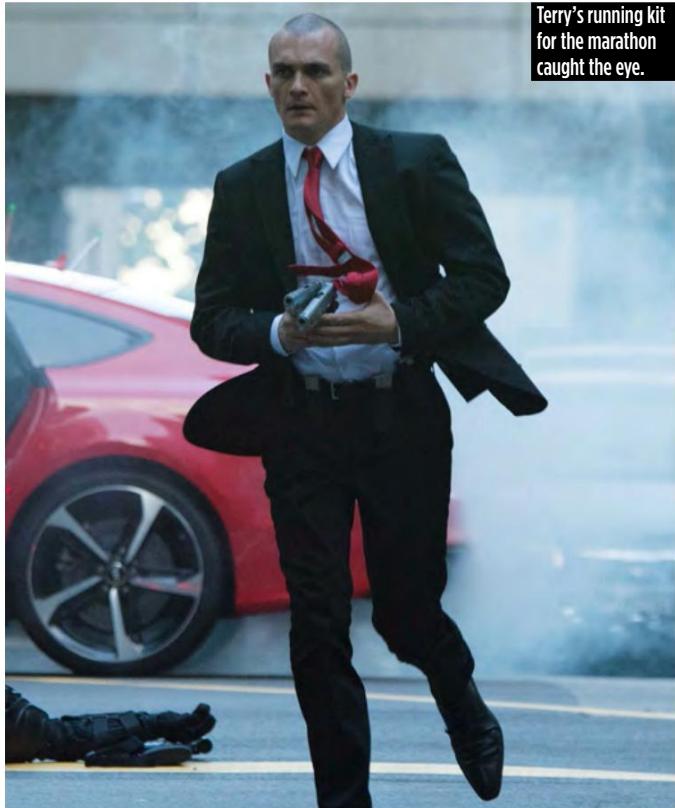
► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2014 | 15 | DVD

➲ The Asylum is famous for its mockbusters – unashamed cash-in Z-movies riffing off current hits, so the title of this one is mystifying until you know it's been renamed from *Age Of Tomorrow*.

Oddly, though, this isn't an *Edge Of Tomorrow* rip-off. It's a terrible *Armageddon* rip-off that turns into a terrible *Battle: Los Angeles* rip-off. Dire on every level, it's not even so bad it's funny. It's as crappy and cynical as fake made-in-the-Philippines action figures.

➲ Extras Gag reel, behind-the-scenes (six minutes). **Dave Golder**



Terry's running kit
for the marathon
caught the eye.

HITMAN: AGENT 47

Franchise killer

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD

► Director Aleksander Bach

► Cast Rupert Friend, Hannah Ware, Zachary Quinto, Ciarán Hinds

➲ There's a sensible school of thought which says that instead of rebooting successful film series, it's duff movies with potential Hollywood should be having another crack at. *Hitman: Agent 47* disproves this idea – if anything, this redundant reboot is worse than the 2007 videogame adap.

This time the dapper chrome-domed assassin (Rupert Friend) teams up with Katia (Hannah Ware) – daughter of the scientist who created the Agent programme – to track down her father before some bad 'uns can build their own army of genetically superior killers. Zachary Quinto has a

thankless role as 47's hammy foil, John Smith.

Don't let the half-decent cast fool you: *Agent 47* is pants, empty action sequences strung together with a tiny bit of plot. Remaining undetected and creatively dispatching your targets is the whole point of the games, but the film is only interested in putting 47 into the middle of outlandish shootouts that wouldn't look out of place in a *Bad Boys* movie.

Friend makes a respectable 47 and a sequence set inside an aircraft engine factory is good fun, but otherwise there's no reason for this film to exist.

► Extras Four minutes of deleted scenes; several featurettes; an on-screen "hit counter"; galleries and trailers. **Jordan Farley**

i You can download Boom Studios' *Hitman: Agent 47* prequel comic for free from Comixology: <http://bit.ly/hitmancomic>.

THE DR GOLDFOOT COLLECTION

Bikini Kill

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

► RELEASED 25 JANUARY

1965/1966 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD

► Directors Norman Taurog/Mario Bava

► Cast Vincent Price, Frankie Avalon,

Fabian, Susan Hart, Laura Antonelli

➲ In his '60s pomp James Bond had to contend with as many spoofs and knock-offs as bullets and sharks. Two of the more lamentable cash-ins found silky horror icon Vincent Price slipping into a smoking jacket to play the diabolical Dr Goldfoot, a power-crazed scientist commanding an army of lethal, gorgeous fembots.

The gloriously named *Dr Goldfoot And The Bikini Machine* finds the Aladdin-slipped mastermind assigning his

underclad robot army to seduce and kill the world's wealthiest men. Teen heartthrob Frankie Avalon is Craig Gamble, bungling agent 001/2 of SIC (Secret Intelligence Command). With an upbeat high-camp vibe somewhere between *Get Smart* and the *Batman* TV show, it's a film that never quite delivers on the delirious mod-era grooviness it promises, wasting the mighty Price among limp slapstick and broad bedroom farce.

"Meet the girls with the thermo-nuclear navels!" cries the poster for truly woeful sequel *Dr Goldfoot And The Girl Bombs*, an Italian co-production directed, improbably, by Euro-horror maestro Mario Bava. Goldfoot's



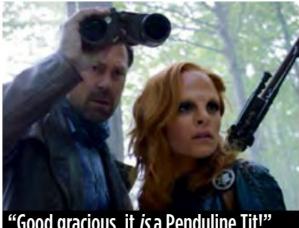
deadly harem is now targeting military top brass in a bid to spark World War Three. Replacement hunk Fabian mugs alongside Italian comedy duo Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia (Tommy Cooper and Ron Hitler from Sparks, essentially) and the whole giddy, lascivious mess collapses into an extended chase sequence, like a comedy sketch

without the good grace to know when to end.

Price called it his "most dreadful movie". But somewhere Mike Myers was taking notes...

► Extras A bonus disc featuring the 1961 Price film *Master Of The World*. **Nick Setchfield**

i *Dr Goldfoot And The Bikini Machine* was originally planned as a musical – the reason Price signed on for it.



"Good gracious, it is a Penduline Tit!"

DEFIANCE Season Three

Datak Ta-ra

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★
► RELEASED 18 JANUARY
 2015 | 15 | Blu-ray/DVD
 ▶ Creators Kevin Murphy, Rockne S O'Bannon, Michael Taylor
 ▶ Cast Grant Bowler, Stephanie Leonidas, Jamie Murray, Julie Benz

➲ "My Name Is Datak Tarr And I Have Come to Kill You." How's that for a catchy episode title, eh? It also, not coincidentally, happens to be one of the best episodes in *Defiance*'s run, and one of the reasons why the final season of this Syfy show proved it was worth sticking with all along.

That said, things do take a long while to really get going this year, even though several characters are almost instantly given the axe – perhaps for budgetary reasons, although you barely notice they're gone later, so that tells you a lot. Thankfully the season picks up once a new race, the Omec, start throwing their weight about, most notably the wonderfully dangerous Kindzi – a disturbing cross between *Farscape*'s sinuous, sexy Chiana and a ravenous hyena.

With a ship full of cannibals hanging above the planet, the town of Defiance under attack from a rogue Castithan general and all the usual alien weirdo nonsense, the series charges towards an *immensely* satisfying series finale that's actually rather beautiful. Few sci-fi shows have this kind of luck, and we're happy that *Defiance* was defiant until the end.

⊕ Extras Deleted scenes.

Jayne Nelson

i The title of finale "Upon The March We Fittest Die", is taken from Walt Whitman poem "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"



And you thought there were no more Page Three models.

HERCULES/ HERCULES II

Laborious viewing

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★
► RELEASED OUT NOW!
 1983/1986 | PG | Blu-ray/DVD
 ▶ Director Luigi Cozzi
 ▶ Cast Lou Ferrigno, Sybil Danning, William Berger, Sonia Viviani

➲ Lou Ferrigno! He's like an '80s version of Vin Diesel, but without the acting talent. Lou Ferrigno! More than a green muscle-clad Hulk, he's also a tanned muscle-clad Herc. Lou Ferrigno! His beard and his pecs twitch in harmony as he faces robot dragons and goddesses in swimsuits.

Hercules mashes together fantasy and sci-fi tropes with such glee it surely must be a spoof. Its overlong opening narration tells us that Zeus, who lives on the Moon, grants superhuman strength to one human infant in order to balance the war between mankind and the forces of Chaos. Hercules grows up living in a stone cottage straight from *The Flintstones*. He punches a bear and then literally flings it *into space*. He uses a battering ram to win a wrestling

contest and finishes by flinging it *into space*. If you're thinking that sounds pure five-star material, let's agree *Hercules* has chutzpah. But it has all the logic and polish of a school pantomime. There's even a pause after evil Ariadne cackles, "We'll FEED him to the SHARKS!" that's the perfect length for you to shout "OH NO YOU WON'T!"

The Adventures Of Hercules II has Zeus sending Hercules back to Earth to find the gods' seven thunderbolts. Along the way he joins forces with Glauca and Urania – both in swimsuits, of course. The three battle several monsters, plus King Minos, who for some reason turns into a giant glowing ape – it's okay though, because Hercules turns himself into a giant glowing dinosaur and fights him *in space*. There's a decent twist 15 minutes from the end but the animated elements are laughably trippy. Still: Lou Ferrigno!

⊕ Extras Just trailers. **Dave Bradley**

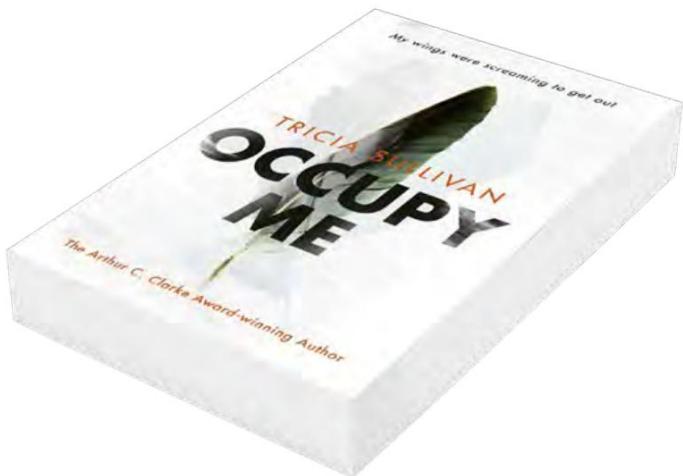
i *Hercules* pocketed two Golden Raspberries: Worst New Star for Lou Ferrigno and Worst Supporting Actress for Sybil Danning.

(ROUND UP)



Hang on, didn't we review the **HELLRAISER TRILOGY** (25 January, Blu-ray) a few issues back? Sort of, but that was the limited edition Scarlet Box, complete with a 200-page book and a fourth disc of Clive Barker's short films, which immediately sold out. If you missed out, Arrow is now releasing a new box set with just the first three films (classic; decent; cheesily Americanised) and associated extras – of which there are a staggering amount. Also getting another run out: *Twilight Zone* creator Rod Serling's other anthology series, **NIGHT GALLERY** (11 January, DVD). Viewers with good memories may recall season one came out on DVD here in 2006, but two and three failed to follow; now Fabulous Films is bringing them all out, both separately and as a complete box set. We said of season one: "It's a mix of tones and approaches, veering from high camp to genuine disquiet. The punchlines occasionally loom vast and obvious on the horizon, but this is delicious '70s gothic, perfect for rainy midnights." Finally, there's good news for fans of *Indiana Jones/Tomb Raider* rip-offs, with the advent of a box set of

RELIC HUNTER SEASON ONE (out now, DVD). This Canadian-made late '90s/early '00s show stars Tia Carrere as an ass-kicking archaeology professor who travels the world rescuing treasures, along with a bumbling English sidekick (how dare they!). It's very formulaic, switch-your-brain-off action-adventure fare. Some previous releases have been of poor picture quality, but this one's a new digital restoration.



OCCUPY ME

Space angels save the day



► RELEASED 21 JANUARY

272 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Tricia Sullivan

► Publisher Gollancz

➲ **Tricia Sullivan is on the** threshold of big things. She was the winner of the Arthur C Clarke award in 1999 (for *Dreaming In Smoke*), and has been shortlisted again twice. This book was tagged as one to watch out for in the last issue of this very periodical. Now we've read it, we can say *Occupy Me* does not cement her position as a modern power in SF, but nor does it topple her back down the hill either.

Pearl is a... something. She's not quite sure. Waking up in a fridge on top of a pile of broken machines ready for recycling at a Long Island tip, she has no recollection of how she got there, only that something is missing, and that she likes to fix things – including people.

Finding work with a secretive organisation who go by the name of The Resistance, she's pulled into a convoluted conspiracy involving big oil, time travel, a mysterious briefcase and higher-dimensional space.

Sullivan's writing can be beautiful. Although at times her prose escapes control and drowns us in artful metaphors, she has a talent for describing things in unusual ways, and mostly succeeds in anchoring this poetry with a conversational style that manages both wit and pace. The characters here are also a great strength. Pearl herself is deeply sympathetic, but it's the humans of the piece that make the story, particularly down-to-Earth Scottish vet Allison. As an expatriate American living in Britain, Sullivan has a sincere affection for the nations either side of the Atlantic.

The story, on the other hand, is confusing, confused and often garbled. The plot begins with a protagonist who is ignorant of her nature, working for an

“It’s a psychedelic experience, a wacky tapestry”

organisation that remains shadowy throughout, run by an AI (maybe) who is never explained, hunting a man who is dogged, shall we say for the sake of not spoiling things, by a terrible split personality, for reasons which are never quite satisfactorily described. Science fiction shines when it has a mystery to be solved, but this is *all* mystery. It gives the reader so little to go on it's bewildering. It settles down, eventually, but we're never given a chance to catch our breath. Trips up and down higher-dimensional continuums, and backwards and forward in time are delivered in a welter of stream of consciousness imagery that just about manages to convey high weirdness, but which is then juxtaposed with strangely mundane excerpts from instruction manuals that undermine the cosmic bonkersness of it all.

Sullivan's cosmology is given in a blur of scintillating sentences that, in the end, ask us to accept things just *because*. Peered at closely, it doesn't hang together. The jokey asides, dinosaurs, angels, artificial intelligence, secret time agencies, odd bird creatures and end of all things make it seem that Sullivan is trying to have her cake and eat it in pretty much every way.

This all contributes to *Occupy Me* having a first draft feeling. It crashes down on us all of a rush, and although its wave of energy surges into the reader and carries us along, we're eventually dumped spluttering and choking on the sand, wondering what the hell just happened. There are messages about post-colonial exploitation, corruption, causality, and being a decent sentient entity in there too. Good messages, all, but they're almost lost in the Gordian Knot of the plot.

Occupy Me keeps the pages turning and the wheels of thought whirring. It's a psychedelic experience, a wacky tapestry of idea. Sadly, it's frayed around the edges, and the picture never quite emerges intact from all the blazing threads. **Guy Haley**

To add to a BA in music and MA in education, Sullivan is studying for a BSc in physics and an MSc in astrophysics.



TRUTHWITCH

Sister Act



► RELEASED 14 JANUARY

416 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Susan Dennard

► Publisher Tor

➲ **Safiya and Iseult are**

“threadsisters” – bound to each other through love, friendship and magic. Iseult is a threadwitch, who sees the ties that bind us all. She's also Nomatsu, reviled by both her tribe and the rest of society. Safi has a rarer type of magic – she's a truthwitch, not that she flaunts the fact. If she did, she'd never be safe, and a safe, normal life is all Safi and Iseult really want. Well, when they aren't busy partaking in criminal activities...

Truthwitch starts mid-highway robbery and the action doesn't stop there. It's a wild ride that takes you from the metropolitan city of Venaza to the high seas, in a well-built fantasy world of magic and greedy empires. Safi and Iseult share a believable bond, and it's great to read a fantasy book where sisterhood and no-nonsense women take the lead.

The fast pace isn't tiring, and what rare quiet moments there are prove the characters alone would be enough to carry the story. You can see why some might draw comparison to Robin Hobb, though it doesn't quite reach such lofty heights. Triumphant fun, *Truthwitch* casts off the current trend for gritty fantasy with a joyous laugh and a cheeky wink.

Bridie Roman

i Susan Dennard owns two dogs: an Irish setter named Asimov and a terrier mutt called Princess Leia.

Reviews



STEAL THE SKY

Trouble at t'pit



► RELEASED 7 JANUARY

640 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Megan E. O'Keefe

► Publisher Angry Robot

Too often genre novels are weighed down with detail, which makes *Steal The Sky* really refreshing. It's set in a desert city, next to a volcano being mined for "selenium", a lighter-than-air substance, and there's an empire looming in the background, but you're never fed masses of information on society, customs or whatever. Megan O'Keefe has clearly put a lot of effort into worldbuilding, but she doesn't feel the need to show it all off; everything you need to know, you learn through the characters.

They, too, are kept to a minimum, the main ones being watch captain Ripka, who's searching for rogue shapeshifter Pelkaia, who compels itinerant scallywags Tibs and Detan (the latter actually a fugitive lord) to help her take revenge on the power-hungry, exiled Commodore Thratia. As their schemes intertwine, you discover more about them and their world, but never at the expense of the tightly-written, engaging story.

There's plenty of action, but the politics and intrigue are also neatly done and believable, as what starts out as a simple act of revenge uncovers plots that could affect an entire continent. A really enjoyable read. **Miriam McDonald**

IMAGINE



DRAKE

Hex and violence



► RELEASED 7 JANUARY

400 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Peter McLean

► Publisher Angry Robot

What connects Raymond

Chandler, Guy Ritchie, Harry Potter and Buffy The Vampire Slayer? "Not much" is probably the answer. Until now.

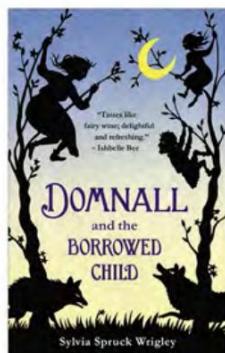
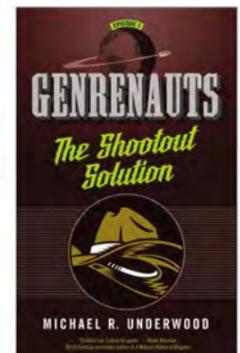
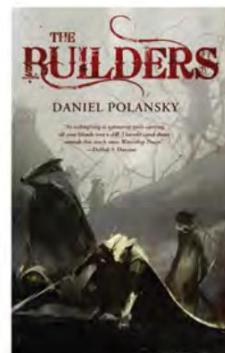
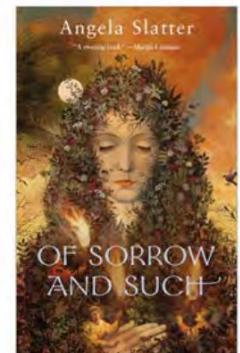
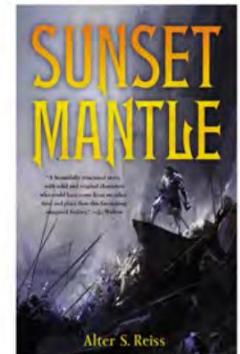
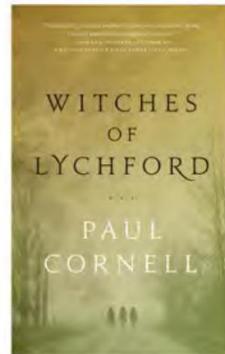
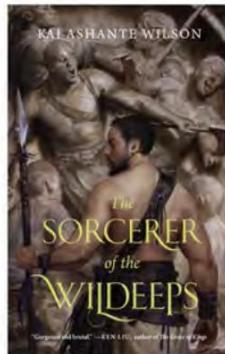
At first glance, Don Drake, the eponymous antihero of Peter McLean's punchy debut novel, appears to be your classic hardboiled, whisky-soaked gumshoe. But he's not a detective at all: he's an occultist hitman who uses the dark arts to rub out his victims, and instead of the boulevards and speakeasies of LA, his beat is the mean streets of South London.

Harnessing the power of the Burned Man – a tiny, sewer-mouthed cockney fetish who summons ferocious demons while effin' and jeffin' like a miniature Danny Dyer – to pay off a gambling debt, Drake finds himself drawn into a gangland turf war with literally hellish consequences.

At times, the book's hard-bitten cynicism borders on the sadistic, not least during the lengthy violent interludes. But as Drake finally discovers his moral compass and sides with the angels (specifically, a gorgeous blonde angel in kitten heels who carves her enemies up with a sword), the stage is set for a showdown between good and evil that will have you cheering for this unlikely champion, despite yourself.

Paul Kirkley

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THE DARK DAYS CLUB

Austentatious



► RELEASED 21 JANUARY

486 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Alison Goodman

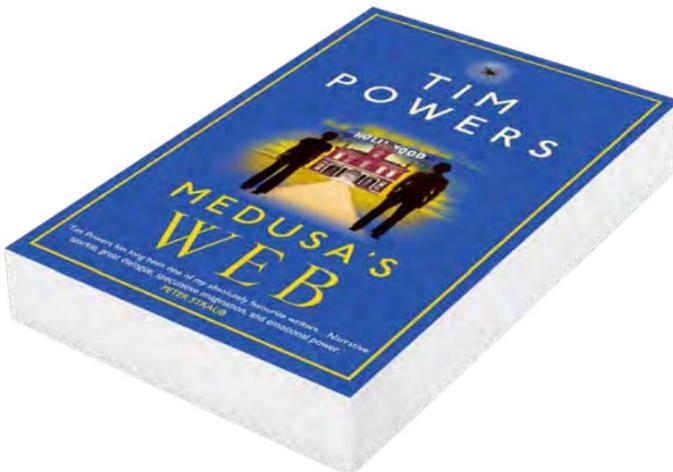
► Publisher Walker Books

“He must think her a trollop,” heroine Lady Helen Wrexhall wonders ruefully at one point in this book, after an encounter with the brooding Lord Carlston. Said encounter saw her a) suddenly discovering she has super-strength, b) sending the unfortunate Lord flying across the room, and c) standing a *tiny bit too close* to the gentleman than is prudent for Regency London society.

And therein lies a huge part of the charm of *The Dark Days Club*: picture Buffy discovering her Slayer strength while surrounded by so many social conventions and taboos that she couldn't even flash a hint of ankle while skewering a vampire, let alone be unchaperoned in a room with another man. (Lud have mercy at the thought!)

It's a simple concept, of course, and one that's hardly original, but what makes this a success is that it's written in such a wholeheartedly convincing style: the research into London in 1812 is *impeccable*, from the *Pride & Prejudice*-echoing dances to the politics of the day. The prose is as witty as Elizabeth Bennet herself and the whole book is a joy from start to finish. We'll be hearing more from Lady Helen – thank the lud. **Jayne Nelson**

i Alison Goodman researched the era so thoroughly that she even wore the clothes and learned the dances.



MEDUSA'S WEB

Celluloid and spiders



► RELEASED 7 JANUARY

368 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Tim Powers

► Publisher Corvus

When a writer co-invents a subgenre like steampunk, it'd be understandable to expect their books to be full of cogs, top hats and majestic airships – but author Tim Powers has spent his career rarely going the expected route. Despite his subgenre-defining early collaborations with James Blaylock and KW Jeter, Powers has instead focused on writing layered and literary blends of sci-fi and fantasy that take the approach of his 1983 classic *The Anubis Gates* and push it even further.

His latest book revolves around a crumbling Los Angeles estate known as Caveat. Following their aunt's death, Scott and Madeleine Madden return to Caveat for the first time in over a decade, but their eccentric cousins who live at

the house are hiding dark secrets connected to their use of “spiders”, strange patterns that give them the ability to travel in time and hijack past lives...

Medusa's Web is a charmingly strange, occasionally bewildering book that throws together plenty of wild ideas and often seems happiest when taking a more roundabout narrative route. Powers mixes heady conceptual time-travel shenanigans with a slightly magical-realist tone, and while the plot carries echoes of the Hollywood-set Clive Barker novel *Coldheart Canyon*, it's more often evocative of the elliptical work of Jonathan Carroll, author of fantasy classic *The Land Of Laughs*.

The result is a book that delivers an intriguing mystery in a manner that's both engaging and frustrating. The central plot is gripping, but Powers's loose, offbeat style means the book never really builds up a sense of momentum. There's humour, quirky characterisation and a lush portrait of LA, yet *Medusa's Web* remains a rambling read that's probably best enjoyed by long-time Powers fans rather than inquisitive newcomers. **Saxon Bullock**

“Probably best enjoyed by long-time Powers fans”

i Tim Powers was a friend and neighbour of Philip K Dick. The character of David in Dick's 1981 novel *VALIS* is based on him.



ASHLEY BELL

Doesn't ring true



► RELEASED 14 JANUARY

576 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Dean Koontz

► Publisher HarperCollins

When you've written

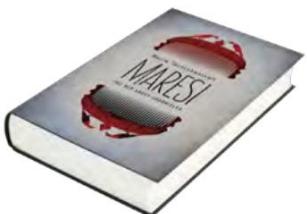
dozens of books over four decades, you can be forgiven the occasional clunker. Inside this much too long novel by veteran Dean Koontz is a decent enough short book, about a young woman – not the titular Ashley Bell, but a young Californian author called Bibi Blair. At the outset, she's told she's dying from a terrible cancer. Then she miraculously recovers and the story becomes a chase, with Bibi pursued by shadowy homicidal enemies.

There are a great many elements – childhood traumas, fortune tellers, a stray dog and neo-Nazi Men in Black – that seem unlikely to add up to anything. In the end, there's quite a good solution, but it doesn't justify the long slog to reach it, full of risibly fey descriptive prose and idealised or demonised characters. Good or bad, they deliver unsayable dialogue. Bibi herself is a fantastically gifted writer and all-round wondergirl, like the dreaded “Mary Sue” of fan fiction. In its favour, the book has some good old-fashioned creeps, involving menacing dark houses and hidden lurking things going boo. And the ending also suggests a rationale for some of the story's irritants. But it doesn't explain why it had to be so inordinately long.

Andrew Osmond

i Koontz was inspired by a letter from a friend with cancer, who had outlived their doctor's prognosis by a year.

Reviews



MARESI

Finnish feminist fantasy



► RELEASED 14 JANUARY

247 pages | Hardback

► Author Maria Turtschaninoff

► Publisher Pushkin Children's Books

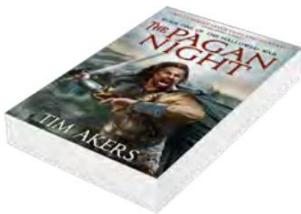
➲ Maria Turtschaninoff

might be an unknown name to most English-speaking readers, but in Finland and Sweden she's won multiple awards. *Maresi* is the first in her new trilogy and also the first of her books to be translated into English.

Maresi lives at the Red Abbey, an idyllic island convent where men are forbidden and girls and women are protected and educated, building an idealised life of work, study and worship. Some girls come seeking learning, some escaping prejudice, and some are running for their lives. One of these is Jai, who's fleeing her cruel, controlling father – but he's not going to let her go lightly.

In a genre where so many works focus on the archetypal “strong female character”, it’s refreshing to find a heroine who isn’t particularly adept at fighting, climbing or shooting, but is instead a bookish girl who loves learning. Red Abbey is very much an idealised community – everyone gets on far too well, and sexuality is pretty much ignored – but that feels only right in a world, so much like our own, where almost everywhere else is both full of danger and empty of opportunity for women. A touching, well-drawn story of female community, solidarity and friendship. **Rhian Drinkwater**

i Turtschaninoff was inspired by visiting an exhibition about a Greek monastery where no women are permitted.



THE PAGAN NIGHT

Oh What A Lovely War



► RELEASED 19 JANUARY

576 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Tim Akers

► Publisher Titan Books

➲ It’s easy to be put off this epic fantasy. *Game Of Thrones* casts a long shadow, and anything featuring bluff, tough men of the North will immediately raise eyebrows. *The Pagan Night*’s placenames feel clumsy – Houndhallow, Greenhall, Cinderfell. However, the story is actually a pretty solid one. Yes, there’s an inevitable North-vs-South conflict as the south and the Celestial church seek to wipe out any lingering northern traces of the old faith they blame for summoning demons into the world, but Tim Akers doesn’t reduce it to a tale of two hemispheres and is capable of writing battle scenes that can hold your attention.

If *The Pagan Night* has a flaw, it’s that it’s a little cosy. The middle-aged Lord of Houndhollow, Malcolm Blakley, is gruff and heroic and loveable. His son Ian is impetuous and foolhardy but basically likeable, as is Huntress of the Fen, Gwen Adair. Jedi-like monk Frair Lucas? Extremely powerful, and loveable. With so many nice characters, it’s a wonder war ever breaks out, and Akers certainly doesn’t believe in killing his darlings.

Not exactly *Game Of Thrones*, then. Instead, this is an old-style chunky fantasy, as comforting as a pair of slippers.

Miriam McDonald

i Tim Akers’ dad is a theologian; maybe why his world-building generally starts with “a single theological truth”.

WHSmith

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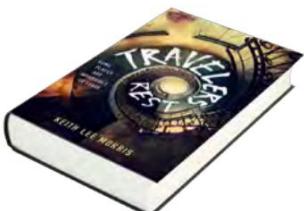
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Travelers Rest

Motel Hell



► RELEASED 7 JANUARY

368 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Keith Lee Morris

► Publisher Weidenfeld & Nicolson

➲ **It sounds like an urban legend.** There's this family – the Addisons. They're driving across America but are caught out in a snowstorm. They decide to shelter in a small town, the ominously-named Good Night (it may as well have "You'll never leave" on the welcome sign), where they check into a motel. Bad move – they're immediately separated and find themselves trapped in its limbo-like corridors.

The blurb references David Lynch, but *Travelers Rest* is more *Wayward Pines* than *Twin Peaks*. There's precious little cherry pie and charm here, just a lingering sense of foreboding. *The Shining* is a clear influence, not least because of its young protagonist, Dewey, who is quick to pick up on the weirdness. But while Keith Lee Morris's prose has a hypnotic rhythm that perfectly captures the uncanny ambience, his characters' frustrations come to reflect the reader's – the book spends too long feeling like it's going nowhere, and you tire of people staring out of the window and commenting on the weather.

It's a shame, as Morris's characters are well-developed and it's all building towards a satisfying conclusion. An ultimately rewarding, if sometimes arduous, journey.

Will Salmon

Once an aspiring actor, Morris turned to writing after reading some lousy local plays and realising he could do better.



All the Birds in the Sky

Fairytales meet wormholes



► RELEASED 26 JANUARY

432 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Charlie Jane Anders

► Publisher Titan Books

➲ **io9 Editor-in-Chief Charlie** Jane Anders has been publishing fiction for some years, notably her Hugo Award-winning novelette of clairvoyant romance "Six Months, Three Days". Both that story and this, Anders' first genre novel, feature a pair of protagonists who find themselves on opposite sides of a moral and metaphysical debate.

In "Six Months...", Judy foresees multiple possible futures, and believes that she and her boyfriend retain free will; Doug, however, sees only one outcome of their relationship, and fatalistically embraces every aspect of it. *All The Birds In The Sky* follows nature-loving witch Patricia and scientist savant Laurence from their shared schooldays as socially-awkward outcasts to adult lives in San Francisco spent trying, in separate and conflicting ways, to save the world.

Patricia and Laurence are the heart of the novel. Their divergent

worldviews and aspirations, grounded in their personalities and experiences, set the tone, and despite the chaos around them – super-storms, wars, disappearing bees – their haphazard, organic friendship remains a touchstone. The pair are surrounded by motley crews of scientists and spellcasters, who offer a convincing picture of how groupthink, conviction and desperation can force well-meaning people into extreme positions. This isn't a novel about science and magic being fundamentally at odds; rather, it is an exploration of the stories we tell ourselves about why we act the way we do, and the limits of individual ability to bring about change.

There is some unevenness: the early stages over-indulge in fairytale logic, giving us parents (and schools) whose hostility is cartoonishly over the top, and some of the narrative transitions are bumpy to the point of being confusing. But this remains a highly absorbing and enjoyable read. **Nic Clarke**

You can read "Six Months, Three Days" online at Tor.com – and debate the ending in the comments: <http://bit.ly/charliesix>.

REISSUES

Titles out in paperback this month include Paul McAuley's **SOMETHING COMING THROUGH** (★★★★★, 14 January, Gollancz). Set 13 years after the arrival on Earth of aliens, it examines both the physical effects of

their advanced tech and the psychological legacy of first contact on human society. We said: "It's smart, it's challenging, and as an exploration of the social consequences of sudden science fictional change, it's very impressive indeed." Also getting another run out is *Spiderwick Chronicles* author Holly Black's standalone YA fantasy **THE DARKEST PART OF THE FOREST** (★★★★★, 14 January, Orion Children's Books).

It follows a brother and sister raised in a town where humans and fae exist side by side, and what happens when a faerie prince who's been asleep in a glass coffin for generations finally wakes up... We said: "Packed with flawed and sympathetic characters, this is a compelling tale of modern-day faeries."

Finally, **DOCTOR WHO: THE DROSTEN'S CURSE** (★★★★★, 21 January, BBC Books) is most likely to

appeal to admirers of Douglas Adams's brief tenure as script editor of the series. Expanded

from a previous ebook by AL Kennedy, it sees the Fourth Doctor becoming embroiled in the mystery surrounding a man-eating golf course... Yes, you read that right. We said: "Kennedy's prose is excellent throughout, and she effortlessly captures the tone of the era that inspired her."

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First Read

AN EXTRACT FROM
A NEW BOOK

ALL THE BIRDS IN THE SKY *by Charlie Jane Anders*

A deeply magical, darkly funny examination of life, love, and the Apocalypse by the Hugo Award-winning editor-in-chief of io9.com, Charlie Jane Anders.

Childhood friends Patricia and Laurence were always outsiders. Laurence was a scientific genius, and Patricia was a witch – a discovery that tore their friendship apart. But now they are grown up, and they are about to be reunited...

Other cities had gargoyles or statues watching over them. San Francisco had scare owls. They stood guard along the city's rooftops, hunched over bright ornate designs that were washed out by waves of fog. These wooden creatures bore witness to every crime and act of charity on the streets without changing their somber expressions. Their original purpose of frightening pigeons

had ended in failure, but they still managed to startle the occasional human. Mostly, they were a friendly presence in the night.

This particular evening, a giant yellow moon crested over a clear warm sky, so every fixture, the owls included, was floodlit like a carnival on its last night in town, and moon-drunk roars came from every corner. A perfect night to go out and make some dirty magic.

Francis and Carrie were screwed. Their lives were over, and you could hear their cries of despair from the street outside the UFO-shaped house. This was supposed to be the geek party to end all geek parties, where the A-listers met the thought-leaders, and visionary investors would supercollide with the best and brightest. Every detail was meticulous, from the three DJs to the fountain of exotic liquor to the organic slow-food hors d'oeuvres. They were even able to host it at Rod Birch's place in Twin Peaks, with the living room that converted to a planetarium where the constellations changed shape to reflect the mood of the crowd.

But everything had gone to shit. The DJs had launched a turf war, and the mashup DJ was



The Author

→ Charlie Jane Anders is the editor-in-chief of io9.com, the extraordinarily popular Gawker Media site devoted to science fiction and fantasy. Her Tor.com novelette "Six Months, Three Days" won the 2013 Hugo Award and was subsequently picked up for development into a NBC television series. She has also had over 100 short stories published by a variety of publications.

trying to colonize the dubthrash DJ's set with some kind of meta-mashup. The Caddy engineers had gotten into a fistfight with the open-source Artichoke BSD developers on the balcony. Everybody felt guilty about drinking *soju* after what happened in Korea. The A-listers didn't show up, and somehow the party invite on MeeYu had gotten cluttered with wannabes, bloggers, and local nutcases. The slow-food hors d'oeuvres made everybody sick to their stomachs, and soon there was an endless line to throw up in the hyperbaric bathroom. The dubthrash DJ won the DJ war and proceeded to make everybody's eardrums bleed with the most dreary shit imaginable. The smoke machine belched horrible candy-floss-scented smog, while the lights lurched into epilepsy-inducing configurations. The line to vomit in the bathroom was starting to resemble that famous photo of the bedraggled masses evacuating Seoul on foot. The constellations on the ceiling became a supermassive black

hole, a Sagittarius A of party foulness. This was the worst disaster in human history.

Just when Francis and Carrie resigned themselves to changing their names and

leaving town, that weird girl showed up. The girl whom nobody would cop to having added to the party invite, the hippie who (Carrie had heard) let birds nest in her hair and rats live in her purse. Paula? Petra? No, Patricia. There had been a time – a happier, more innocent time – when Francis and Carrie had believed that Patricia showing up would be the worst thing that could happen to their party.

"Sorry I'm late," she told Carrie, slipping out of her shoes as she strode into the front room. "I had to run some errands across town."

As Patricia walked into the party room, the fugly smoke parted and the lights swung together, so her Bettie Page hair had a halo and her wide face was lit by a floodlight aurora. She seemed to float into the room, barefoot in a small strappy black dress that left her pale shoulders mostly exposed. Her necklace had a heartstone that caught the arclights and refracted pink sparkles. She walked through the party, saying hi or introducing herself, and everybody she touched felt the nausea and ill feeling pass away. As if she'd painlessly drawn some poison out of them. She wandered past the DJ and whispered in his ear, and moments later the awful cringing dubthrash music was replaced by soothing dubstep. People swayed happily. The wailing and lamentation became the hum of conversation. The bathroom had no line. People started hanging out on the balcony for reasons other than punching each other or throwing up in the bushes.

Everybody agreed that Patricia had salvaged the party at the UFO house somehow, but nobody could have said how. She'd just kind of shown up, and the vibe had improved. Carrie found herself making Patricia a thank-you cocktail, holding it out in both hands, like an offering.

Patricia hadn't needed much magic to rescue this awful party from the brink – fixing an upset stomach was second nature to her, after some of the dorm-room cooking at Eltisley Maze, and the partygoers did most of the heavy lifting themselves once she redirected their energies a bit. But just like with the poet in North Beach and the junkie in the Tenderloin, the most important thing was not to let

anybody see her doing magic – she'd been indoctrinated never to share her big powerful Seekrit with anyone, but she needed no reminder in any case. She still remembered her friend in middle school whom she'd done magic in front of, how he'd lost his shit and run away, and stopped talking to her right when she needed him. When she told herself that story nowadays or shared it with others, she boiled it down to: "I showed my magic to a civilian one time, and it got ugly."

Other than that, she hadn't thought about that kid in years. He'd been reduced to a single cautionary anecdote in her head. But she found herself thinking about him now, maybe because she was surrounded by geeks, or because pulling this shindig back from the Party Abyss with her bare hands was reminding her of how weird social interactions could be, here in the "real" world. Especially after so many years in the bubble of Eltisley Maze. And somehow, the image popped into her head of the boy, naked in a closet with bruises all over and blood caked

“You could hear the cries of despair from the street outside the UFO-shaped house”

around his nostrils. The last time she'd seen him. She found herself hoping he'd turned out okay after all, and then as she finished her loop around the party, he was standing right in front of her. Almost, but not quite, like magic.

Patricia recognized Laurence right off the bat. The sandy hair was the same, cut into a messy part instead of a fringe. He was a lot taller and a tad stockier. The eyes were the same hazel-gray and his chin still jutted, and he still looked kind of perplexed and a little pissed off about everything. But that could be because

he was one of the people she hadn't yet healed. She did that now. He was wearing a collarless black button-up shirt with a small tiger embroidered on it, and black canvas pants.

"You feeling okay?" she said.

"Yeah," he said, straightening up. He half-smiled, and rolled his neck like an owl. "Yeah. Thanks. Starting to feel better. There was something weird about those hors d'oeuvres."

"Yeah."

He did not recognize her. Which made sense, it had been ten years, and a lot had probably happened. Patricia should just keep moving through the party. *Just move along, don't try to have some kind of bullshit uncomfortable reunion.* But she couldn't help herself.

"Laurence?"

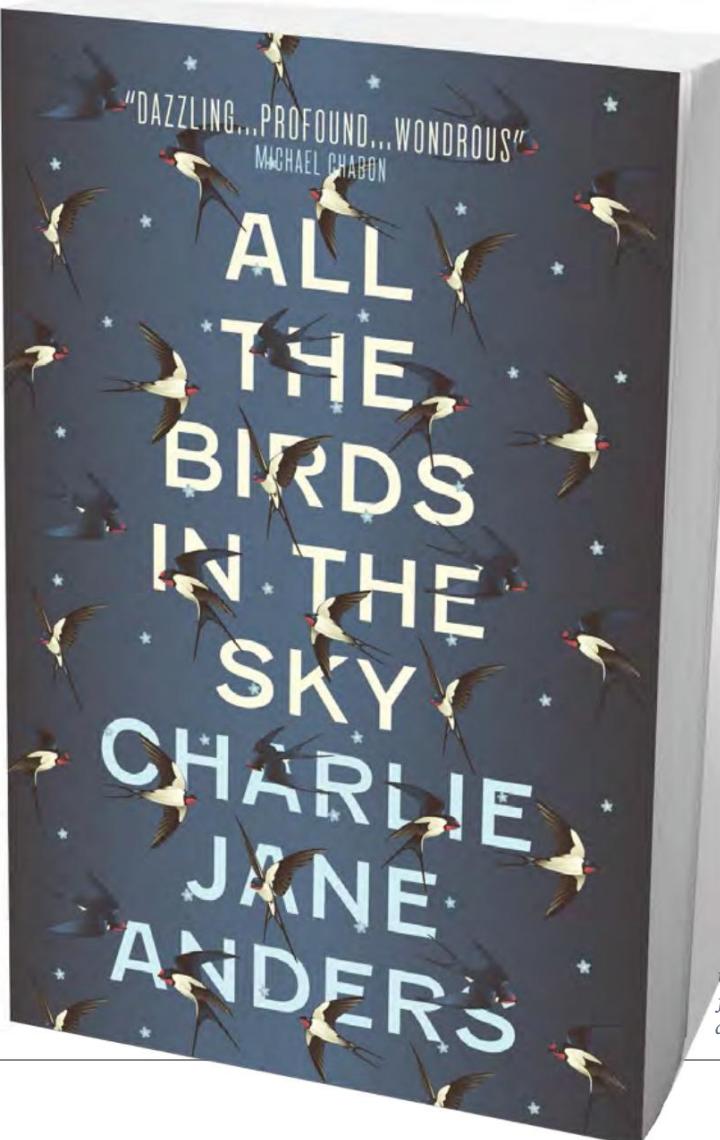
"Yeah." He shrugged. And then his eyes grew. "Patricia?"

"Yeah."

"Oh, cool. It's good to, uh, see you again. How have you been?"

"I've been good. How are you doing?"

"I'm good too." Long pause. Laurence shuffled and kneaded a square napkin. "So. You violate any laws of physics lately?" ●



To find out what happens next, pick up All the Birds in the Sky, out now from Titan Books (RRP £7.99). E-book also available. www.titanbooks.com

DOCTOR STRANGE

Magic, madness and moustaches



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

- Publisher Marvel
- Writer Jason Aaron
- Artist Chris Bachalo

ISSUES 1-3 It's funny what having

a movie in the pipeline can do to your status in the Marvel Universe. Sorcerer Supreme Stephen Strange hasn't had his own ongoing series since 1996, instead largely acting as a go-to magical expert in various crossover epics. Now, with Benedict Cumberbatch about to embody the character on-screen, Marvel have decided it's time to give Doctor Strange another serious push, so he's in the frontline of their latest "All-New, All-Different" relaunch.

With Jason Aaron on script and Chris Bachalo on art duties, there's a strong creative team in place,

and *Doctor Strange*'s first three issues are an efficient jumping-on point for new readers. As always, Stephen Strange is based in New York, where he battles any magical threats that endanger the world – but when a Bronx librarian named Zelma Stanton asks for help with an otherworldly illness, it's actually the first step in the plans of the Empirkul, an alien race dedicated to hunting down and destroying magic across all realities...

Aaron is in a lighter mode here, playing closer to the freewheeling craziness of his early *Wolverine* and *X-Men* work than his more mythic storytelling on *Thor*. The pace is brisk, and there's a playful sense of fun to many of the setpieces, which is enhanced by Bachalo's zany approach to the art. Any *Doctor Strange* comic faces the uphill struggle of trying to

match the surreal visuals of co-creator Steve Ditko in the character's original '60s run. Bachalo has a head start thanks to his naturally offbeat art style, but here he pushes his work even further, showcasing some spectacular double-page spreads alongside a wide selection of cartoonish weirdness and gorgeously grotesque highlights.

There's plenty here to enjoy, and the introduction of the Empirkul shows the series is already building towards an epic confrontation, but there are also some fundamental flaws. Strange himself is loosened up as a character, more prone to wisecracks and romance, and

“It hasn’t achieved the right balance of drama and kookiness”

while these moments are often fun, he now bears too much resemblance to Marvel's current take on Tony Stark.

The series also hasn't quite achieved the right balance between drama and kookiness, with the rising apocalyptic threat seeming odd sitting next to exclamations like "By the Vapors of Valtor!", and some of the background story detail (like Strange's visit to a magical bar) feeling a little too random. This new incarnation of Doctor Strange is visually appealing and often entertaining, but it still feels like Aaron and Bachalo are missing out on that elusive ingredient that would make this latest Marvel relaunch feel truly essential. **Saxon Bullock**

Jason Aaron is the cousin of Gustav Hasford, who wrote the novel *Kubrick* used as the basis for *Full Metal Jacket*.



Doesn't look like she's made of paper...

PAPER GIRLS

It delivers



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

- Publisher Image Comics
- Writer Brian K Vaughan
- Artist Cliff Chiang

ISSUES 1-3 Having one of the

bigest recent successes in comics gives you freedom to experiment – and *Saga* mastermind Brian K Vaughan is taking full advantage of that fact with his new projects. Recent mecha miniseries *We Stand On Guard* was a definite tonal swerve from *Saga*'s kooky craziness, but his latest ongoing series represents a gentler change, bolting colourful sci-fi onto a more grounded emotional world.

Paper Girls follows four 12-year-old girls who are delivering newspapers in a quiet middle-American town when they encounter a mysterious artefact. They then discover that almost everybody in town has vanished, the sky has changed, and strange creatures now prowl the streets.

The first three issues are well-crafted and entertaining, and while this may not be quite as immediately compelling an opening as *Saga*'s, the series does capture an intriguing, accessible mix of sci-fi and hard-edged emotive realism. Vaughan's character work and dialogue are as strong as ever, while Cliff Chiang's art mixes inventive designs with an expressively quirky style, making *Paper Girls* yet another Image ongoing series that's definitely worth your attention. **Saxon Bullock**

i *Barrier*, a new pay-what-you-want comic by Vaughan and Marcos Martin, is available from panelsyndicate.com.



Better than a hankie.

TOKYO GHOST

System Addicts



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

- Publisher Image Comics
- Writer Rick Remender
- Artist Sean Gordon Murphy

ISSUES 1-3 Three ongoing

series from Image Comics wasn't enough for writer Rick Remender, and now he's teamed up with acclaimed artist Sean Gordon Murphy to add another to the list. Unfortunately, it seems that Remender might be spreading himself too thin, as crazed cyberpunk thriller *Tokyo Ghost* makes for a haphazard, uneven experience.

In the twisted future LA of 2089, the population is addicted to technology, while gangsters enforce their law via constables like Debbie Decay and Led Dent. Teen lovers turned ruthless killers, Debbie and Led dream of escape to the technology-free garden nation of Tokyo, but their only chance is to accept a mission to destroy Tokyo's protective EMP field...

There are some fascinating ideas in the first three issues, and Remender taps into powerful themes while aiming for the same pulp grandeur he's achieved in his other Image titles. Unfortunately, he botches the central characterisation and overplays the frenzied 2000 AD-style dark humour, with excessive and obnoxious results. Murphy's artwork is as breathtaking as ever, matched by the amazing colours of Matt Hollingsworth, but it's not enough to redeem what's so far been a grating, clunky SF satire.

Saxon Bullock

i A fan of The Cramps, Remender named his characters along similar lines to singer Lux Interior.



Press those buttons
and it opens his flies.

STAR WARS: VADER DOWN

Sith happens



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

- Publisher Marvel
- Writers Jason Aaron, Kieron Gillen
- Artists Mike Deodato, Salvador Larocca

ISSUES 1-3 Marvel's line of Star

Wars comics have gone out of their way to genuinely feel like *Star Wars*, aiming to capture the same blend of characterisation, myth and fast-paced, high-stakes action. Now, we've got the first big-scale crossover between the two core ongoing titles (*Star Wars* by Jason Aaron, and *Darth Vader* by Kieron Gillen) and the result is a gloriously enjoyable pulp adventure.

When Vader's search for Luke Skywalker accidentally brings him up against the Rebellion, the Sith Lord's TIE Fighter is shot down, stranding him on a distant planet far from the Empire's assistance. The Rebels use this as a chance to try and kill Vader once and for all – but they haven't reckoned with the power of the Dark Side, and Vader is soon fighting back with

devastating consequences.

At the time of writing we're halfway through the six-issue story, and it's already delivered great setpieces and fantastic twists, with co-writers Aaron and Gillen clearly relishing the opportunity to show Vader's abilities on a grander scale than the classic trilogy ever managed. The story isn't much more sophisticated than a thrill-ride, but it's still pulling off some memorable moments, especially when the classic *Star Wars* heroes encounter new characters like the murderous protocol droid Triple-Zero and his assassin astromech sidekick BT-1.

Art-wise, Mike Deodato's work is vivid, though a little stiff in comparison to the sections handled by regular *Darth Vader* artist Salvador Larocca. Otherwise this lively action romp is pretty much unmissable for any self-respecting *Star Wars* fan. **Saxon Bullock**

i Due in Feb: a one-shot C-3PO special, which will explain how he acquired a red arm for *The Force Awakens*.



"Here's one I made earlier."

AQUILA: BLOOD OF THE ICENI

Roman Horror Day



► RELEASED 14 JANUARY

- Publisher Rebellion
- Writer Gordon Rennie
- Artists Leigh Gallagher, Patrick Goddard

GRAPHIC NOVEL Opening with the main character being resurrected after being crucified alongside the rest of Spartacus's rebel army, *Aquila* brings an intriguing Christian angle to the usually pagan-dominated fantasy genre.

Set around 69AD, it takes place at that crucial juncture when the old deities were on the verge of giving way to "the Carpenter God". Though loosely inspired by the old *Tornado/2000 AD* stalwart Blackhawk, *Aquila* owes as much to Sláine. Transformed into a supernatural killing machine by malevolent entity Ammit the Devourer, the Nubian warrior is a sometimes frustratingly unknowable blank slate. He also lacks Sláine's anarchic sense of humour.

This collection charts *Aquila*'s journey from besieged Londinium to the Roman capital itself, taking in such historic figures as Boudicca, Nero and St Peter. Leigh Gallagher's more visceral linework on the first and third storylines meshes seamlessly with second section artist's Patrick Goddard's more polished finishes, and Gordon Rennie's punchy script offers an enthralling view into this dire world. **Stephen Jewell**

i After *Tornado* merged with *2000 AD* in 1980, Blackhawk was abducted and taken to an space gladiatorial arena!

DOCTOR WHO: ONLY THE MONSTROUS

Life During Wartime



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

237 minutes

► Director Nicholas Briggs

► Cast John Hurt, Jacqueline Pearce,

Lucy Briggs-Owen, Carolyn Seymour

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO CD/DOWNLOAD John Hurt's grizzled War Doctor was a fascinating enigma when he first appeared. He was, we were promised, a new version of our hero – one so dangerous that all of the Doctors since flinch at his memory. The 50th anniversary adventure was wonderful, but if it had a flaw, it was that Hurt wasn't that bad at all – in fact, he turned out to be rather loveable.

This set of three stories is a chance to flesh out the character, as well as the Time War. Dramatising a conflict that takes place across all of time and space and in different dimensions would be difficult on audio, so Nick Briggs's script cheekily (and temporarily) impedes the Daleks' time travel capabilities – and leaves an injured Doctor on the planet Keska. "The Innocent" pairs him up with Rejoice (Lucy Briggs-Owen), a young woman who nurses him back to health in a sci-fi take on *The English Patient*. It's not long before the war comes calling again, however, and "The Thousand Worlds" finds the

“Hurt's a very likeable take on our favourite Time Lord”

Doctor in a labour camp (very reminiscent of "The Dalek Invasion Of Earth" – and that's before you find out what the peppermots are up to). A clever twist here ties all three adventures together, with "The Heart Of The Battle" picking up immediately afterwards, with the Doctor forced to oppose another Time Lord, who is suing for peace with the Daleks...

In places it feels like the dialogue could have done with another polish – the Doctor tetchily snapping, "Don't call me that!" is repeated far too often. There's also a weird bit where some poorly-chosen sound effects accidentally give the impression that the Doctor is beating up his companion – he's dark, but not *that* dark. Still, *Only The Monstrous* is solidly entertaining. There's a delicious irony in pitting the usually pacifist Doctor against a peacemaker, and Jacqueline Pearce plays Cardinal Ollistra with camp glee. The set hinges on a tough decision, and Hurt plays that scene with bitter acceptance. His incarnation isn't a monster – he's a very likeable take on our favourite Time Lord, and it's good to spend more time with him. **Will Salmon**

i The War Doctor's adventures in moral ambiguity continue in February with a second set of three stories, *Infernal Devices*.



THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES

Abridged Too Far?



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

58 minutes

► Publisher Big Finish

AUDIO CD/DOWNLOAD Whether

you think condensing Ray Bradbury's story of Mars colonisation from 28 connected short stories into an hour-long drama is a brave or stupid venture, you have to assume it's doomed to failure. Yet this 2014 Radio Four adaptation is a surprisingly effective attempt.

Boasting an impressive cast (including Derek Jacobi and Hayley Atwell), pacy direction and phenomenally atmospheric sound design, it's certainly a polished production. Wisely, it ejects many of the short stories and concentrates on those that best embody the novel's themes of racial prejudice, the devastation of war and the triumph of the human spirit. Bradbury's very American views on colonisation feel slightly odd with British accents but the script makes the issues feel relevant today.

You still have to wonder why anyone would actually want to condense *The Martian Chronicles* into an hour, mind. They pull it off, just, but even if you haven't read the book, there's definite a sense of "scratching the surface" – despite a clever framing device, a couple of the story choices still feel like curiously disconnected detours. More *Martian Reader's Digest* than *Chronicles*, then, but still enjoyable. **Dave Golder**

i Writers Richard Kurti and Bev Doyle also penned Sky 1's two-part adap of Terry Pratchett's *Going Postal*.

GAME OF THRONES Season One

Did you win, or die?



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Telltale Games

► Reviewed on Xbox One

► Also on Xbox 360, PS3, PS4, PC, Mobile

VIDEOGAME

There came a moment, towards the climax of *Episode Six: The Ice Dragon*, when we suspected that we'd made a colossal mistake. Maybe even several. Ten minutes later, the tale of our Forrester clan was being neatly recapped by a handful of key *GoT* characters telling of their interactions. We smirked at remembering acts of defiance, and near-wistfully recalling fallen allies we'd turned on and sold out. No regrets. This obscure family may not meet the happiest of endings (what did you expect?) but it feels true to Westeros.

The collection of interlocking plotlines through the series

serves almost as a greatest hits compilation of familiar locations – the Wall, King's Landing, Meereen – as well as teasing a few others, such as when you

head deep into Wildling country in search of the (whispers) North Grove. Spoiler: what you do find is essentially a small shark for you to leap over.



And they all lived happily ever after. Well, maybe.

It also puts you face-to-face with some of *GoT*'s biggest names, voice-acted by their HBO counterparts. Of course, interactions with them are largely tangential – can't mess with canon, after all – but they help ground the series in the fictional universe. Given the scope of the source material, it feels wholly probable that there are scores of families like House Forrester – absent almost entirely even from the books – with a story to tell.

Granted, it's not always told with the greatest of technical or aesthetic skill. We never warmed to the smudgy, painterly art style. Your decisions might not always feel as gutwrenching as Telltale would like. But people can (and often do) live or die based on your choices, and you'll develop an attachment to this little family that could. Or could they? Who it is that gets the iron from that ice is ultimately in your hands.

Emma Davies

i We've reviewed individual episodes before, but we'd recommend you play the series as a whole – it's worth the effort!

XENOBLADE CHRONICLES X

Chronicles Of Ridiculous



► RELEASED OUT NOW!

► Publisher Nintendo

► Reviewed on Wii U

VIDEOGAME After romping up and down the legs and shoulders of two colossal gods, few JRPGs have come close to matching the visual ambition of Wii's *Xenoblade Chronicles*. Once you've watched the sun set under the looming arches of a vast kneecap, it's hard to imagine getting excited for anything less.

Until, that is, you meet *Chronicles X*'s space whale: a flying luminescent beast that dances in the moonlight beneath a shimmering Aurora Borealis as misty spray from a 200ft waterfall fills the air. Once again developer Monolith has our full attention. Welcome to Mira, the last human stronghold in the galaxy – and,

more importantly, your new benchmark for virtual sci-fi tourism.

Mira is a huge world of astonishing imagination, and rather than gate off higher-level

beasts in late-game nooks and crannies, it throws them all in together, making for a more thrilling ecosystem as you weave your way across its plains



Well it sure beats a wet weekend in Wales.

and valleys. Engaging Mira's bloodthirsty wildlife is, for the most part, an absolute treat, as X's combat system arguably improves on Monolith's previous Wii scraps.

Throughout X, however, there's a distinct lack of welcoming charm, particularly compared to its predecessor. *Xenoblade*'s effortless blend of quests, exploration and combat is buried under heaps of acronyms and division names, and the wonder of discovery is bogged down by the tedious chore of planting data probes to expand your map – this kind of bureaucratic nonsense has no place in this world.

For all its flaws, though, there's no denying that Mira's beauty takes your breath away with every new horizon, and the breadth and depth of each biome only makes it that much more satisfying to discover. It may lack the heart of Wii's JRPG stunner, but the rest of X's anatomy stands shoulder-to-shoulder with giants. **Katharine Byrne**

i You come across some awe-inspiring sights, but names like Whale Nostril don't really do them justice...



FUNKO
PRODUCT OF
THE MONTH

COLLECTABLES

What we've been playing with this month

1 Proving that *Doctor Who* merchandise continues to expand in any and every direction you can possibly imagine, this **TARDIS silicone gelatin/cake mould** (FPI price £15.99; product code C6610) is one for all the bakers out there. No, not you, Colin. It'll apparently withstand temperatures from -40°C to 230°C, and is dishwasher

and microwave safe; the blurb also suggests you "make some wibbly wobbly gelatin or a timey wimey cake", and says the mould won't get "bumpy-wumpy". Stop speaking like a child, for god's sake! The War Doctor would not be happy.

2 Family-friendly franchises like *Star Wars* may call them "mini glasses", but

because George RR Martin's telly saga is a grown-up franchise for grown-ups, these **Game Of Thrones shot glasses** (FPI price £12.99; product code C8871) tell it like it is. The four tiny flagons come emblazoned with the sigils and family mottos of four famous Westeros houses. Presumably the Targaryen one is best for a flaming Sambuca, the Lannister for the

most expensive drink you can find, and the Greyjoy for plain, boring vodka. As for the Stark glass, we reckon it's the most likely to get broken first.

3 The crew from the Bat-prequel show get the cute-but-creepy treatment in Funko's range of **Gotham Pop! vinyl figures** (FPI price £9.99 each; product codes D3143, D3144, D3145, D3147, D3148). Future Commissioner Jim Gordon wields a GCPD badge while bearded, law-bending bro Harvey Bullock struggles to stand upright beneath his fedora – then again, it could be the booze. There's also young Bruce Wayne, proto-Catwoman Selina Kyle, and season one's sassy

All products are available at

forbiddenplanet
international
home shopping

www.forbiddenplanet.co.uk
01621 877 222

Reviews



queen of crime Fish Mooney. Oswald Cobblepot is also available for all your stabby, mother-fixated needs. Trigger warning: oblong baby heads with NO MOUTHS.

4 Playing with this **Leatherface ReAction figure** (FPI price £8.99; product code D3406) is tinged with sadness, given the passing, back in November, of actor Gunnar Hansen, the man behind the human-hide mask. Though this is branded as part of a *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* range, there's no sign of miniature versions of say, Grandpa or the crazy hitchhiker. But if you're worried about ol' Leathery getting lonesome you could always stand him alongside

the Horror Series figures (such as Freddy, Jason and Pinhead) Funko released a while back.

5 The Dark Knight could have made good use of this **Batman cushion with pocket** (FPI price £12.99; product code C6519) after his back-breaking run-in with steroid-supervillain Bane, as it offers excellent lumbar support when stuffed down the back of a chair. The cushion's utility belt also doubles as a handy three-pocket remote control/phone/shark repellent Bat-spray holder, but having angular pieces of hard plastic digging into you while lying on Batman's disembodied torso isn't our idea of relaxing.

6 If these **Universal monsters ReAction figures** (FPI price £13.99 each; product codes D4382, D4383, D4386) inspire feelings of déjà vu, there's good reason. Funko released versions of all three – Karloff's Frankenstein's Monster, Lon Chaney's Wolfman and the Creature from the Black Lagoon – ages ago. But the original figures were in full colour, whereas these limited editions variants are in black and white! As gimmicks go it sorta makes sense, given the movies were monochrome, but it does make the designs less eyepleasing – especially the drably unitone Creature, who just looks like an accidentally unpainted factory reject. ●

THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



GROOT AND ROCKET MUGS

► Funko has branched out into kitchenware! These *Guardians* mugs feature stylised fizzogs of everyone's favourite sentient tree/ass-kicking raccoon. They're not dishwasher safe, though, so you'll have to pull your marigolds on.



FOAM BAT'LETH

► This four-foot-long replica of the iconic Klingon weapon is rendered in safe, soft foam. No good for stabbing an impudent insubordinate then, but perfect for cosplay... or just working off a bit of IT-related stress at the end of the day.



ALIEN DIECASTS

► This Space Jockey is just one of four diecasts being released by NECA, to kick off their Cinemachines range. They're also bringing out the derelict ship from *Alien*, plus a dropship and an Armoured Personnel Carrier from *Aliens*.



SEASON 6

THE WALKING DEAD

Divide and conquer

- UK Broadcast Fox, midseason break
- US Broadcast AMC, midseason break
- Episodes Reviewed 6.01-6.08

Thanks to box sets, ubiquitous catch-up services and social media, where spoiler-etiquette demands the immediate disembowelling of anyone who hints at plot points less than 600 years after broadcast, watercooler TV is becoming an endangered species. It's a testament to *The Walking Dead*'s ability to get people talking that even in its sixth season it remains a show you *have* to watch live, or risk falling well behind on the conversation.

This was especially true of season six's first half, which experimented with a compressed time frame and split-perspective format that frustrated as much as it thrilled. It's not the first instance of *The Walking Dead* dividing its cast, but it's a big problem when major players such as Daryl and Michonne barely feature, while the holding pattern the show fell into half way through the run felt particularly irksome when all anyone wanted to know was "WHAT THE HECK HAPPENED TO GLENN?"

But, man alive, were those first three episodes spectacular. In fact,

we'd rank the trio of overlapping tales about Rick's ill-fated plan to redirect a colossal zombie horde away from Alexandria and an unfortunately timed attack by the Wolves among the best run of episodes the show has ever had. It's a rare example where weekly breaks between episodes were not only welcome, but essential – attempt to watch "First Time Again", "JSS" and "Thank You" back to back and you'll barely breathe for three hours, culminating in Glenn's gut-wrenching dumpster dive.

That controversial Glenn cliffhanger could prove a make or

ZOOM IN



BEST EPISODE ▲

→ "JSS" (6.02), directed by Jennifer Lynch (daughter of David, and helmer of *Boxing Helena*) is brutally effective, as half of Alexandria is unexpectedly slaughtered by the Wolves.

TRIVIA

→ A spin-off Telltale game featuring Michonne is set to be released in February.

BEST MOMENT

→ Eastman's quietly chilling monologue about the murder of his family in "Here's Not Here" (6.04) was outstanding writing and acting.

RATINGS

→ For the first time in six years *The Walking Dead* broke its unprecedented season-on-season ratings rise, with the premiere episode down from 17.3 million for season five to 14.63 million for season six.

DID YOU SPOT? ▼

→ A pack of Morley cigarettes in "JSS" – the same brand that *The X-Files*' Cigarette-Smoking Man puffs on.





break moment for the show. *The Walking Dead* has always prided itself on the fact that anyone could die at anytime, but does Glenn's miraculous survival mean that the big five (Rick, Daryl, Michonne, Carol and Glenn) are safe, especially outside of season finales? It's not the first time *The Walking Dead* has pulled a fake-out death – Carol seemed to cop it in season three – but refusing to reveal Glenn's fate for quite so long led most to assume that *of course* he survived.

What was great: a rare flashback episode where we finally learnt why Morgan has sworn off bloodshed, featuring exemplary guest stars John Carroll Lynch and Tabitha the goat. Its placement was perfect – a blissful change of pace after the carnage of the preceding episodes. It's just a shame the remaining episodes failed to capitalise – four examples of serviceable but far from thrilling storytelling that focused on character, but offered scant insight.

Showrunner Scott Gimple has revealed that the second half of season six will be "very, very

“How long can the show keep up the settlement cycle?”

different from the first half in tone and the line-up of characters”, with a plot-driven structure centred on external threats. With Alexandria lost (for now) it seems likely the gang will hit the road again, but how long can the show keep up with the settlement cycle before it starts to bore?

That's part of the reason why this first half of season six felt so welcome – experimentation is an important reason why *The Walking Dead* is an unqualified phenomenon. It might not always hit the mark, as these eight episodes prove, but for a show about shambling corpses it's got a surprising amount of life left in it yet. **Jordan Farley**

Leave it Kev,
he's not worf it!



BEST IN SHOW

The characters who make TV great



PENGUIN

Why *Gotham*'s scheming Oswald Cobblepot rules

► UK Broadcast Channel 5 (from February) ► US Broadcast Fox

• The first season of

Gotham didn't go down quite as well as the showrunners hoped, with viewers complaining about all sorts of things – from Jada Pinkett Smith's hammy performance as Fish Mooney to the fact that young Batman wasn't quite as interesting a character as we thought he'd be. If there was one thing everybody agreed on, however, it was that *Gotham*'s proto-Penguin was brilliant.

Seemingly from nowhere, Robin Lord Taylor stepped into Oswald Cobblepot's probably ill-fitting shoes and, somehow, became the Penguin. From his humble beginnings working for Fish to his new role, circa season two, as *Gotham*'s biggest crime lord, Oswald's rise has been staggering – like the waiter in the House Of Commons bar ousting David Cameron as PM. And through it all, Taylor's performance has been impeccable: a bold mixture

of sleaze, intelligence and violence... all tempered with a surprising vulnerability.

That's because the writers decided to make their Penguin a mummy's boy. Utterly bewitched by his demanding, loopy mother – played by Hollywood comic legend Carol Kane – Oswald comes across as a little boy trying his best to make it in the big mean world. Which, of course, makes his murderous plotting all the more shocking.

If anything, you find yourself rooting for him. And yet he's as vicious as any villain Jim Gordon comes across, making our soft spot feel rather icky. And that's what makes him a great villain. He's not a one-note, one-sided bad guy – he's a rounded human being, who does everything he does for a reason (so far there seem to be two: to stay alive and to make his mummy proud). Long may this wonderful Penguin waddle. **Jayne Nelson**

Just make sure you
keep your TARDIS this
clean and neat, Clara.



SERIES 9

DOCTOR WHO

A complex hybrid of the old and new...

- UK Broadcast BBC One, finished
- US Broadcast BBC America, finished
- Episodes Reviewed 9.01-9.12

➊ Divisive. That's the word that best sums up Peter Capaldi's second year of TARDIS travel. Depending on your taste this was either the season that returned the show to its must-see glory, or the moment that *Doctor Who* turned in on itself.

With its focus on two-part tales, numerous nods to the past and repeat visitations from Maisie Williams' Ashildr, it was certainly a year that rewarded long-term viewers over casual channel-surfers. Realistically, the much-worried-over drop in overnight ratings is no disaster, but the season's first half felt strangely lacking in buzz. Perhaps that was

down to the late start times or the lack of new cast members, but it probably wasn't helped by "The Magician's Apprentice" – the least newbie-friendly opener the show has ever had.

The episodes that followed were strong, but perhaps a little too familiar, while the Hybrid arc was tenuously threaded throughout and resolved with a shrug. And while Capaldi has fully grown into the character, bringing warmth and humour to his spikiness, Clara was oddly sidelined.

And then the Zygons invaded and everything changed. Peter Harness and Moffat's two-parter was an instant classic, with action, a powerful metaphor and a central speech that felt almost painfully relevant. It set the tone for a more adventurous second half of the

season where even the old-school "Sleep No More" ended with the Doctor losing and you, the viewer, killed by the monsters. And then, a week later, Clara died...

"Face The Raven" was a real blow. And although she came back, Clara's death feels significant. That's partly down to "Heaven Sent", which put the Doctor through billions of years of torment, but also because her resurrection came with another price: the Doctor's memories. It's a melancholy twist, but it ensures that Clara's resurrection doesn't feel cheap. And given that she's spent so long trying to be the Doctor, giving her a TARDIS to run off in was an appropriate fate and an uplifting end to a complex, occasionally awkward, but rewarding season. **Will Salmon**

ZOOM IN



BEST EPISODE ▲

→ "Heaven Sent" (9.11): This one-hander, which found the Doctor trapped in hell, was jaw-dropping in its audacity.

TRIVIA

→ Clara's death was planned for earlier in the season, until Steven Moffat decided that it would be more effective as a lead-in to the finale.

IT'S WOSSISNAME! ▼

→ Donald Sumpter has appeared in *Doctor Who* twice before playing Rassilon



in "Hell Bent" (9.12) – in 1968's "The Wheel In Space" and 1972's "The Sea Devils".

BEST MOMENT

→ The final montage of "Heaven Sent", as the Doctor breaks through the wall with one punch after another.

DID YOU SPOT?

→ "The imbecile's gas" in "The Zygon Inversion" (9.08) is a reference to Tom Baker-era companion Harry Sullivan, who created the anti-Zygon gas and the Doctor famously declared an imbecile.



LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

HOOK

"Oh Swan, of course I still have feelings for you. Anger. Hatred. Disappointment."

Once Upon A Time,
Episode 5.10

EUGENE

"Hey, I'm a weapons novice holding a significant blade here, and there are people in my proximity with open-toed shoes."

The Walking Dead,
Episode 6.07

THE DOCTOR

"I hate gardening... It's dictatorship for inadequates."

Doctor Who,
Episode 9.11

LIVEWIRE

"There are so many ways to skin a..."

CAT GRANT

"...Cat. Yes, congratulations. You have the wit of a YouTube comment."

Supergirl,
Episode 1.05

IRIS

"I couldn't pick my butthole out of a line-up."

American Horror Story,
Episode 5.07

SCRIPT EASE

A TV season distilled

SEASON 1

SUPERRGIRL

She's Superman's cousin, you know...

► UK Broadcast Sky 1, Thursdays

► US Broadcast CBS, Mondays

► Episodes Reviewed 1.01-1.06



KARA DANVERS
(VO)

I'm Kara Zor-El, Superman's cousin. I have all his powers, but I don't use them because I'm a PA for media mogul Cat Grant. I really want to help people, though...

ALEX DANVERS
Kara, you can't. Even though you have superhuman strength and are impervious to pretty much anything, it's too dangerous.

CAT GRANT
[Insert snarky comment here]

A plane is on a crash course for a river.

KARA
I've had it with this. I'm going to save the day and reveal myself to the world.

ALEX
Naughty Kara! But you're a hero! Maybe I should have told you, though, that I'm not really a doctor. I'm actually an agent for the DEO, a

government acronym you've never heard of.

KARA

Awesome! We can hang out having 20-something fun, and save the world from aliens.

HENSHAW
Yeah, it's like *Smallville*. Turns out there are lots of superpowered DC types wandering around National City who haven't turned up on *Arrow* or *The Flash* yet. I'm just crossing my fingers nobody notices my glowing red eyes...

KARA

I'm so happy I should probably tell my best friend Winn about my new secret identity.

WINN

I love you, Supergirl/Kara! Just my luck that this Jimmy Olsen chump has moved on to my turf – and he's no longer the dweeby, bow-tie sporting photographer from

the movies, dammit.

JAMES OLSEN

I've got romantic lead status, so I'm called James now. I'm here to keep my eye on you, Supergirl. Your cousin asked me to. He also told me that wearing glasses is a brilliant disguise.

SUPERRGIRL

I'm Superman's cousin, you know.

I've got super strength and am impervious to pretty much anything. And I have a pair of glasses.

I don't need protecting. But at least there's somebody else who

knows my secret identity. Now mean old Cat Grant is the only series regular who doesn't know.

CAT GRANT

[Insert snarky comment here]

SUPERRGIRL saves lots of people, but is still compared unfavourably to SUPERMAN.

SUPERRGIRL

If you're so great, cuz, why do we never see your face?

SUPERMAN

I'm busy fighting Batman on the big screen. I'm way too big for this TV stuff.

SUPERRGIRL

It's actually pretty hard work being Kara Danvers and Supergirl, you know.

CAT GRANT

[Insert snarky comment here] But despite my hard-as-nails exterior, I totally understand, and have a lot of respect for both Kara and Supergirl.

SUPERRGIRL

Then why the hell didn't you call me Superwoman? It's the 2010s after all.

CAT GRANT

Er...

THE AUDIENCE

[Insert snarky comment here]

Richard Edwards

The post-rapture world is clearly not a happy place to be.



SEASON 2

THE LEFTOVERS

Post a-plot-all-cryptic drama

- UK Broadcast Sky Atlantic, finished
- US Broadcast HBO, finished
- Episodes Reviewed 2.01-2.10

Remember magic eye pictures? Those abstract patterns that only formed an image if you “relaxed” your eyes? Season two of *The Leftovers* is similar. It makes more sense if you stick your fingers in your ears and close your eyes altogether.

The show has been receiving rapturous reviews, even from the likes of *The Guardian*. It seems being wantonly weird can cut you a lot of slack. Are some critics scared to admit it’s rubbish for fear they’re “missing the point”? Possibly. Much of the time it’s just obtuse for the sake of it.

Season one was decent enough. Quirky, inventive and playful with

its storytelling, sure, but very watchable. The show started with 2% of the world’s population vanishing overnight but it was never concerned with the why; instead it intelligently explored how people coped in the aftermath. It also had a fantastic grasp of visual storytelling with many ingenious montage sequences that said so much more than reams of dialogue.

Season two kicks off with an utterly pointless extended sequence with a cavewoman peeing in a river; it’s boring, overlong and introduces more unwanted fantastic elements that muddy the strong, simple central context. Then the plot moves to an entirely new location with a whole new bunch of characters – a town called Miracle where nobody

vanished. Finally, some characters we remember from season one show up but events seem to have moved on significantly. From then on in episodes move back and forward in time to fill in gaps and play plotting tricks on the viewers.

Tricks being the pertinent word. The writers probably think they’re being bold and experimental. Mostly they’re just being irritating. The effort that you as a viewer put into keeping track of the weaving, backtracking storylines is rarely rewarded with a decent revelation.

There are moments that work, when a plot twist delivers a gut punch or the post-rapture world reveals some other grisly dimension of grimness. It’s stylishly shot and impeccably acted. But ultimately it’s an exercise in elaborate smoke and mirrors. **Dave Golder**

ZOOM IN



BEST EPISODE ▲

→ “Off Ramp” (2.03): Laurie plans to expose the Guilty Remnant by writing a book on her experiences, while son Tom tries to rescue waverers from their grip.

IN-JOKE?

→ We spent the whole of the episode “Ten Thirteen” (2.09) looking for other *X-Files* references, but failed. (*The X-Files* was made by Ten Thirteen Productions.)

CHANGING THE THEME

→ The jaunty new theme song is “Let The Mystery Be” by Iris DeMent (1992). It was also used in the final episode of *Northern Exposure*.

BEST MOMENT

→ Kevin singing “Homeward Bound” in “I Live Here Now” (2.10) – proof that bad karaoke can be emotional!

DID YOU SPOT? ▼

→ Most of the songs on Kevin’s Wheel of Karaoke have a religious theme: “Like A Prayer”, “Livin’ On A Prayer”, “Angel Of The Morning”, etc.



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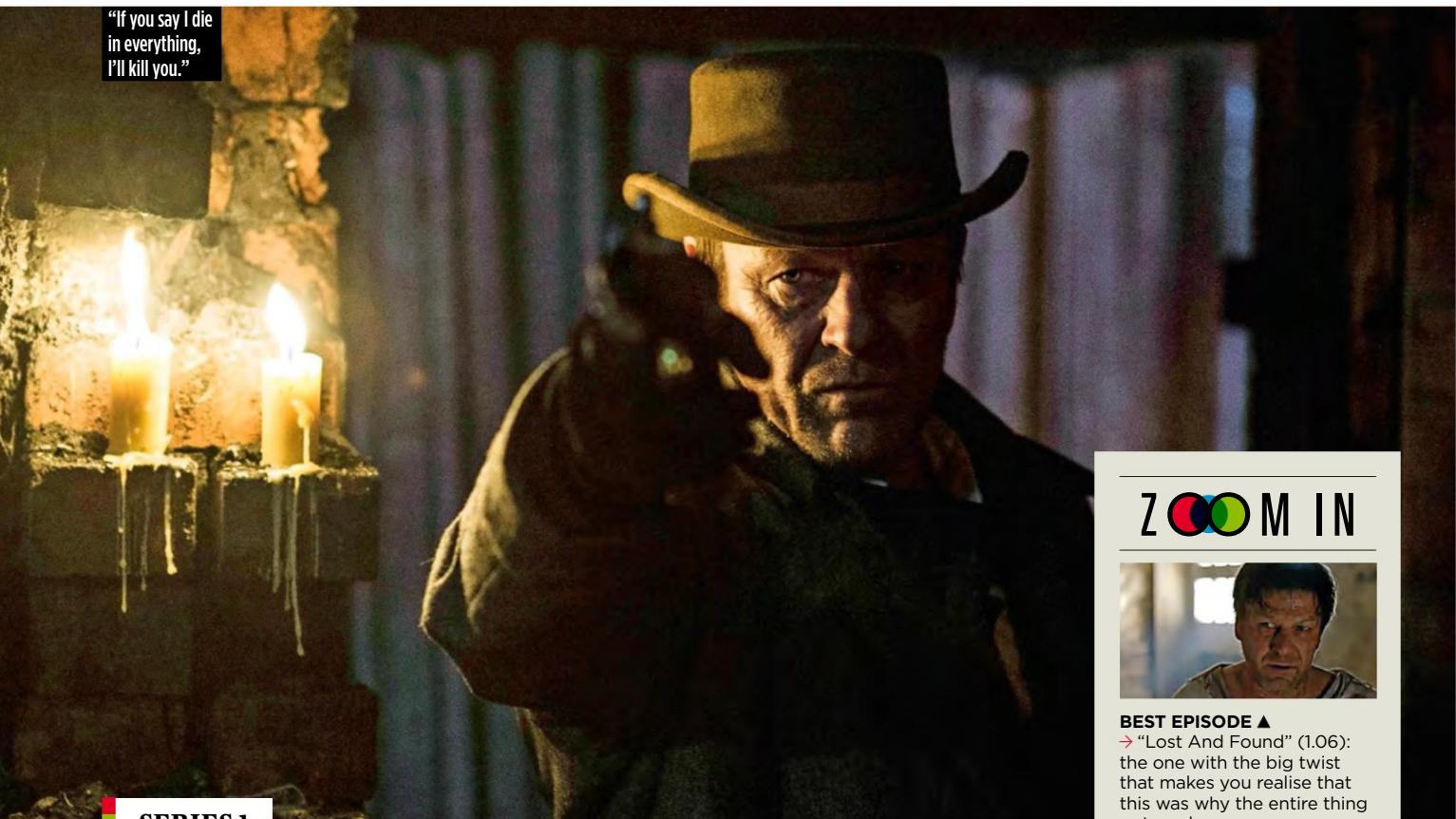
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"If you say I die
in everything,
I'll kill you."



SERIES 1

THE FRANKENSTEIN CHRONICLES

The great gothic stitch-up

► UK Broadcast ITV Encore, finished

► US Broadcast A&E, TBC

► Episodes Reviewed 1.01-1.06

➲ Although *The Frankenstein Chronicles* appears to have been conceived as a one-off series, you can't help but wonder what a series two might be like. Very different is the obvious answer. The final episode – which clearly contains the conceit from which the entire story was backwards engineered – is the very definition of a game-changer but one which sets up a premise you can't help wondering about.

Fanciful? Hell, what about this

gothic chiller isn't? Set in what's near as dammit an alternate history early 19th century, it plays so fast and loose with established facts that this is like the muddy, meta-flipside to *Penny Dreadful*; as opposed to being a mash-up of some of the century's greatest fictional monsters, *The Frankenstein Chronicles* has the great creators of the time – Mary Shelley, Dickens, Blake – involved in a grisly mystery involving stitched-together corpses, the Anatomy Act (which sought to regulate surgeons and the use of cadavers) and Robert Peel's formation of a police force.

Oh, and Sean Bean as John Marrott, a syphilitic river cop whom Peel brings in to oversee the case. Well, it makes a change from alcoholic or OCD policemen.

The tone is all grim and gritty, like Ken Loach doing *Bleak House*. The plot, though, is unashamedly lurid. This is a six-part police procedural with pulpy horror trimmings. It's a heady concoction that doesn't skimp on shocking imagery and queasy concepts.

Occasionally the tone strays a little too far into penny dreadful territory. A monstrous child-catcher comes across like Fagin meets a Bond villain's henchman and it jars. There's also the slightly nagging feeling when it's all over that the plot has been too much a slave to the "big revelation", populated by cogs in a machine.

As a piece of quirky, grisly TV horror, though, it's pleasingly gothtastic. **Dave Golder**

ZOOM IN



BEST EPISODE ▲

→ "Lost And Found" (1.06): the one with the big twist that makes you realise that this was why the entire thing got made.

TRIVIA

→ In case you weren't aware, Boz is actually Charles Dickens, but he didn't use that pseudonym in print until 1834 in the real world.

NEED TO KNOW

→ John Marrott was a soldier in the 95th Rifles and fought at Waterloo... coincidentally, so did Richard Sharpe, also played by Sean Bean in the ITV show.

MORE TRIVIA ▼

→ In the first episode Marrott consults Thames tidal information for 1826. In the next episode William Blake dies, which was in 1827.

BEST MOMENT

→ "All The Lost Children" (1.03): Marrott confronts what the future holds for him when he sees the horrific effects of late-stage syphilis. Not nice.





SFX's

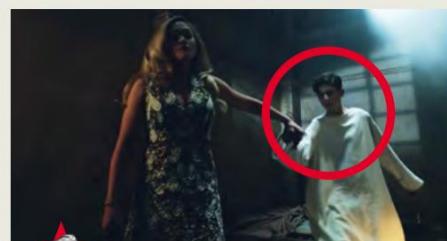
SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



ANALOGUE WIZARDRY OF THE MONTH ↗

We know *Arrow*'s Felicity is a tech genius, but playing a Betamax tape on a laptop is next level smarts.



SOUP FANTASTIC OF THE MONTH ↗

The Doctor scoffed a bowl of Heinz twice in two weeks. Maybe he's got an endorsement deal?

SEPARATED AT BIRTH OF THE MONTH ↗

Jessica Jones or Victor from *The Returned*? You decide!

RUBBISH COSPLAY OF THE MONTH ↗

Bruce clearly put no effort into that ghost costume on *Gotham*.



WANNABE SUPERHERO SHOW OF THE MONTH ↗

Is *iZombie* trying to muscle in on The CW's DC universe?

DISTURBING FASHION TRENDS OF THE MONTH ↗

Forget lobe gauging, unicorn horning is the next big thing on *Supernatural*.



OVER THE HILL SUPERHERO OF THE MONTH ↗

The Vision has let himself go on *Supergirl*.

JOKER OF THE MONTH ↗

Exploding presses? *The Flash*'s Mark Hamill is the Joker!

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD OF THE MONTH ↗

Lily Salvatore has a big dry cleaning bill in *Vampire Diaries*.

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Blastermind
The SFX quiz



PHILIP K DICK

Twenty brain-bending questions in honour
of the celebrated sci-fi author

• Quizmaster: Jordan Farley, Community Editor

QUESTION 1

"We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" was adapted as which film?

QUESTION 2

For which novel did Dick win a Hugo Award?

QUESTION 3

What are *The Exegesis Of Philip K Dick*?

QUESTION 4

Who directed the big-screen adaptation of *Paycheck*?

QUESTION 5 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the film.



QUESTION 5



QUESTION 14



QUESTION 9

QUESTION 7

In *The Three Stigmata Of Palmer Eldritch*, what are CAN-D and Chew-Z?

QUESTION 8

Name the unfinished third book in the *VALIS* trilogy.

QUESTION 9 PICTURE QUESTION

Which organisation do these dapper chaps work for?

QUESTION 10

Which *Alien* writer penned the screenplay for *Screamers*?

QUESTION 11

Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said is set in a dystopian America

where what led to the collapse of democracy?

QUESTION 12

Disney is said to be developing an animation based on which Dick fantasy short story from the '50s?

QUESTION 13

Dick wrote how many published novels: 33, 44 or 55?

QUESTION 14 PICTURE QUESTION

This is the original cover for which Dick book?

QUESTION 15

Name the lingo that Gaff (above)

uses in *Blade Runner*.

QUESTION 16

What is the act of japery committed by Allen Purcell in *The Man Who Japed*? Clue: it has something in common with *Simpsons* episode "The Telltale Head".



QUESTION 17

In which year was Dick's debut novel *Solar Lottery* first published?

QUESTION 18

Name Dick's final, posthumously-published, novel.

QUESTION 19

What are the names of the three precogs in Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report*?

QUESTION 20

Which 1967 Dick novel, set after Earth has been conquered by aliens, started life as a sequel to *The Man In The High Castle*?

How did you do?

Which Dick are you?



→ 0-5
Tricky Dicky



→ 6-10
Dick Jones



→ 11-15
Dick Turpin



→ 16-19
Dick Dastardly



→ 20
Dick Van Dyke

Total Recall

Personal recollections of cherished sci-fi



Photography by Olly Curtis

MR MERLIN BOOKS

Jayne Nelson, SFX writer

Ah, the 1980s. For all that we look back on them with fondness today (and the younger generation even wear the same clothes...), actually *being* there was like living in the Dark Ages. I was 10 years old in 1982 and loved so many TV shows I couldn't even count them, but didn't experience the joy of owning a VHS recorder until the start of 1983. Which meant that I would watch a show on TV and then... well, that was it. It was gone. There were only three channels back then, after all, and they shut down at midnight, so it wasn't as though shows were repeated endlessly as they are now.

So it was a sad day for me when a little series named *Mr Merlin* stopped airing, because I knew I might never see it again. It was a silly US sitcom about a teenage boy, Zachary Rogers (Clark Brandon), who discovered, after pulling a crowbar out of a block of cement, that he was destined to become the new apprentice of grumpy old wizard Merlin (Barnard Hughes) in modern-day San Francisco. Merlin taught Zachary all his tricks and, inevitably, Zachary got the spells wrong and caused no end of havoc.

It was the greatest show I'd ever seen (well, I was 10). I recorded the



beginning credits onto cassette tape, but that was all I had to remember it by when it ended. I missed it and assumed I would never see it again. And then one day I walked into a bookshop and found these two *Mr Merlin* tie-in books. The joy!

The first book contained the show's first episode, while the second was an original story. I read them again and again, keeping Merlin, Zachary and all their adventures alive. Also, as the years passed, I realised that they weren't simply cheap and nasty tie-ins written by someone who didn't care – they were produced by William Rotsler, a man well-known and beloved in sci-fi circles, who'd won four Hugos for his artwork and written five *Star Trek* books.

It's so hard to comprehend today, but TV and film tie-in novels were a godsend back then. Without access to videotape, let alone video rental shops or the prospect of owning a film or show, the only way to relive something was to read it. Thanks to authors like William Rotsler, who slogged away in other people's universes to pay the rent, our fantasy worlds were kept alive. Thank you, sir. ☺

Fittingly, Jayne now regularly works for a man named Merlin.

Fact Attack!

→ Mr Merlin himself, Barnard Hughes, was also Grandpa in *The Lost Boys*. Clark Brandon stopped acting in '89 and now works at a school in California.

→ William Rotsler has the honour of being the person who gave Lieutenant Uhura her first name, Nyota, in *Star Trek II: Biographies*.

→ Rotsler's drawing of a doll with a rag in its mouth inspired Harlan Ellison's famously chilling story "I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream".

→ Rotsler worked in porn before being urged to take up writing SF by Ellison. In 1973 he wrote *Contemporary Erotic Cinema*, studying adult film.

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DETAILS ON
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